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## SUMMARY

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The early writings of Augustine reveal that a neo-Platonic conception of moral excellence can allow for a moderate enjoyment of temporal goods, including those that the church associated with marriage. Through experience and theological reflection, however, Augustine began to appreciate the sinfulness of man and the importance of divine grace. When the Pelagians challenged



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his teaching, then, he was prompted to elaborate a doctrine of original sin which cast aspersion on the sexual desire of man. His theological insights led him to qualify some of the views that others expressed on the subject of chastity but he was able to assure the anxious monks that his conception of divine grace did not conflict with their conception of Christian identity.

The monastic version of the Christian life developed from the protest which ascetics had been making against the moral laxity of the church. This confirms our view that patristic and early medieval ethics was designed largely to cope with a crisis of confidence in Christian identity. The monasteries provided the early medieval church with its leadership and so successive generations of the faithful had the ascetic pattern of virtue impressed upon them.

An improvement in social conditions led theologians of the High Middle Ages to express new confidence in human reason and greater interest in the temporal prospects of man. Anselm of Canterbury developed a theory of the atonement in which the monastic conceptions of divine justice and human obedience were extended and room was made for an appreciation of the dynamics of historical existence. Hence he found no fault in marriage. Nevertheless, he maintained the superiority of celibacy, partly because the loyalty that celibates gave to the



church was an important factor in the power that it wielded over medieval society.

The premium that Peter Abelard placed upon human reason led him to challenge many traditional doctrines and practical abuses of the church but it also led him to attack the sensual nature of man. Although he denied that sexual pleasure was intrinsically sinful, then, he went so far as to claim that marriage was an obstacle to salvation.

Hugh of St. Victor accepted the Augustinian account of the human predicament but his sacramental view of the world enabled him to discern something of value in marital love. The responsibility that ecclesiastical courts were assuming for matrimonial affairs also gave Hugh the opportunity to emphasize the freedom with which a couple should choose to enter into a relationship of mutual love.

The cautious approval that some theologians were now giving to marital sex could not avert the romantic protest against this aspect of Christian ethics. However superficial or idealistic courtly lyrics and romances may have been, they emphatically rejected the theological estimates of woman and sexual love.

The thesis concludes with an analysis of the ethical system of Thomas Aquinas. With his knowledge of Aristotle, Thomas was able to appreciate the order that reason could discern

in, and impose upon, the world. His doctrine of natural law affirmed both the power of human reason and the goals of social life. However, respect for the authority of the church led him to maintain the traditional view of Christian perfection. Since he also confused the status of medieval woman with natural law and made room for the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, his account of marriage was not as favourable as it might have been.

From this analysis we conclude that theological principles did help to determine the patristic and medieval ethics of sex but that the most important factors were sociological.



**THEOLOGY AND THE ETHICS OF SEX**

**A study of Patristic and  
Medieval Writings**

**vol. I**

**by**

**John A. Menley, B.A., B.D..**

**Submitted for**

**The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)**

**to**

**The University of Glasgow**

**in 1971.**

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with an issue which is similar to the one that recently led James Gustafson to produce the book Christ And The Moral Life.<sup>1</sup> Gustafson proposed to analyse and reflect upon the answers which different theologians have given to the question of the significance of Christ for the moral life. He chose to concentrate upon statements which have been made about the work of Christ and to relate these to the fundamental problems which an ethical system is designed to solve. Gustafson agrees with Henry Sidgwick that there are three problems with which writers on ethics must come to terms.<sup>2</sup> The first is 'the ontological question of ethics, the question of the nature and locus of the good.'<sup>3</sup> The other questions concern 'the faculties of human action' and 'the principles and duties that govern' human behaviour.<sup>4</sup> In other words, ethics deal with the 'questions of the good, the moral self, and the criteria for judgement and action.'<sup>5</sup> Gustafson therefore proceeds to discuss the answers which have been given to these three questions by theologians who have provided different interpretations of the work of Christ. The theologians whose work is analysed in Christ And The Moral Life are those whom the author has 'found to be significant for the ways in which they have answered the question' concerning the

1. James M. Gustafson, Christ And The Moral Life, Harper & Row, New York, Evanston, and London, 1968.

2. Ibid, p. 2.

3. Ibid, p. 4.

4. Ibid, p. 2.

5. Ibid, p. 4.



moral significance of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Gustafson points out that the relation between religious beliefs and the morality of the people who hold those beliefs is an issue that is only beginning to attract the attention it deserves and he recognizes that it can be approached in a variety of ways.<sup>7</sup> Our approach has been quite different from that which he adopted and the difference has been due largely to the interest that we have taken in the influence which theology may be said to exert upon ethics. Whereas Gustafson sought primarily to clarify the relation between the terms in which theologians had expressed their faith and their general conception of the moral life, we have endeavoured to ascertain whether such relations as can be shown to exist between theology and ethics indicate that the latter derives, either in whole or in part, from the former. This project has led us to examine ethical matters which Gustafson could afford to ignore. These matters relate to what he calls 'views of men's action in the world.'<sup>8</sup>

Since ethics is concerned with the factors which are involved in moral decision, it deals with many questions that are more specific than those fundamental ones in which Gustafson was interested. A person may be well aware of the purpose of the moral life and of the virtues or duties which are in accordance with goodness or rectitude but he may still find it difficult

6. Ibid, p. ix.

7. Ibid, p. 6.

8. Ibid, p. ix.

to decide what he should do in a particular situation. Ethical investigation therefore extends to the types of situation in which men and women are likely to find themselves. Although it may be said that situations always differ from one another and that the task of moral decision must therefore be left to the person who is involved in the situation, it can also be said that certain factors are operative in more than one situation and that the task of the moral philosopher must therefore include analysis of these factors and judgment concerning the kinds of action that they require, permit, or exclude. This was certainly the view of the theologians whose writings have been examined in this thesis and it is therefore appropriate to ask whether their theological teachings have influenced the analyses and judgements that they made. In order to answer this question we shall also have to examine the relation between their doctrinal statements and their general conception of the moral life. However, it should be noted that patristic and early medieval theologians rarely distinguished between theological and ethical principles. Many of their ethical judgments were based on doctrines which now seem to have little relevance to ethics. Thus the doctrine of the Virgin Birth was presumed to imply that the Christian should prefer celibacy to marriage. Such a judgment may seem to indicate that



irrational forces have gained control of theological ethics but we intend to show that critics who have reached this conclusion have themselves made too hasty a judgment. The theologians of the patristic and early medieval church were content to write occasional treatises on ethical subjects and so failed to provide us with a systematic account of their views. Nevertheless, their ethical teaching was based on principles which can be inferred from their writings and which are far from irrational.

In order to bring the issue that we have chosen to discuss into focus we decided to concentrate upon the contribution that theology has made to the ethics of sex. We have thus limited the theological, as well as the ethical, scope of the thesis because we have only had to look at doctrines which bear upon the sexual attitude and behaviour of man. The doctrines of creation, original sin, and the sacraments are therefore among those which have claimed our attention. The interest that we have taken in the ethics of sex has also helped us to determine the theologians whose views we should examine. With the exception of Anselm of Canterbury, all the theologians with whom we have dealt in this thesis have had something significant to say about sexual morality. We made an exception of Anselm of Canterbury because he developed a novel theory of original sin and also had some interesting things to say about the Virgin Mary.

We decided to concern ourselves with the ethics of sex for a number of reasons. In the first place, sexual behaviour is quite a discrete area of ethical concern and the ethics of sex can be analysed more easily than issues of social ethics because the latter are more likely to impinge on each other. Furthermore, sexuality is such a fundamental part of human nature and it is so important for society to regulate sexual behaviour that variations in the treatment of these matters are likely to be infrequent and yet significant. In addition to these methodological considerations the attention which advocates of a so-called 'new morality' have been paying to the ethics of sex prompted us to reassess what theologians have had to say on the subject. Thus the fundamental question which is discussed in this thesis can be formulated as follows: What influence have the terms in which theologians have expressed Christian faith exerted upon the accounts that they have given of sexual morality?

The theologians in reference to whom we have asked this question represent either the patristic or the medieval church. Their selection was due to a variety of considerations, the most basic of which was the allowance which had to be made for historical causes of ethical variation. The theological ethics of the Middle Ages may differ markedly from the ethics of patristic theologians but the difference might be the product, not of

theological divergence, but of social and cultural change. Differences in the ethics of theologians who belong to the same historical period might be more indicative of the ethical import of theology, although it is, of course, possible that circumstances were also responsible for these differences. However, it is doubtful whether environmental factors will always provide an adequate explanation of ethical variation. They may lead to a situation in which the theologian (or moral philosopher) has to deal with new ethical options but they will rarely prevent him from maintaining an old one. Nevertheless, they may well provide him with an opportunity to appreciate the limitations of previous ethical judgments or of the principles on which they were based. In that case he may be expected to revise his ethical system and he will be responsible for the revision that he decides to make. Thus environmental factors may prompt a theological revision which itself becomes a factor in the revision of ethical judgments. In view of this possibility it has been necessary for us to examine the theological ethics of more than one historical period.

The sexual morality that still prevails in many sections of the Western or Latin church was conceived and elaborated by theologians of the patristic and medieval periods. In spite of the importance which therefore attaches to their ethics

of sex, recent treatments of the subject have often dismissed what they had to say. Writers who have been proposing a new morality have paid much attention to the ethics of sex but they have taken little or no account of the views expressed by patristic and medieval theologians<sup>9</sup> and some of the scholars who have surveyed the traditional views have preferred to explain them away instead of seeking to understand them. Thus D.S. Bailey has treated patristic theologians, who have been renowned for the profundity of their thought, as 'psychological cases',<sup>10</sup> and a similar bias is to be found in the work of W.G. Cole.<sup>11</sup> We therefore decided that it was time to undertake a thorough analysis of the statements that patristic and medieval theologians made about sexual morality and to take note of the reasons that they themselves gave for the views they expressed.

In the Introduction to Christ And The Moral Life Gustafson observed that his investigation of the relations between theology and ethics would have to be supplemented by enquiries in which 'closer and more detailed work' is done on particular crucial texts in particular authors.<sup>12</sup> This

9. v. e.g. Douglas Rhymes, No New Morality, Constable, London, 1964, chapter, 1.
10. D.S. Bailey, The Man-Woman Relation In Christian Thought, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., London, 1959, esp. ch. III, v.p. 50 for the quotation.
11. W.G. Cole, Sex In Christianity And Psycho-analysis, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1956, esp. pp. 43-93.
12. op. cit., p. 6.



is the kind of work that we have endeavoured to do and it has led us to produce a thesis in which views that are similar have often been subjected to more than one careful examination. Repetition is, of course, unavoidable in a work which deliberately looks for variations in the accounts which theologians of a common faith and a similar background have given of the same subject. Nevertheless, the contents of the thesis do vary more widely than one might have anticipated. The variety of the contents has been increased by the inclusion of a chapter which deals with the courtly or romantic literature of the High Middle Ages. This chapter might not seem to belong to a theological thesis but romantic notions have made such an important contribution to the Western conception of sexual relations that no discussion of the ethics of sex can afford to ignore them. The lyrics and romances that emanated from medieval courts have also been discussed because they indicate that some members of the medieval aristocracy were dissatisfied with the sexual morality that the theologians and other churchmen were recommending to their contemporaries. Thus weight is added to many of the criticisms that we, who are so far removed from the patristic and medieval scenes, have chosen to make of the theologians with whom we have dealt.

We have already mentioned that environmental factors might prove to be more productive of variations in ethical

judgment than theological considerations. In order to determine whether this was the case, however, we have not had to undertake a vast amount of historical research. We have of course sought to familiarize ourselves with the historical setting of the theologians in whom we were interested but we considered that a careful analysis of the writings of these theologians could be expected to reveal the factors which led to their ethical judgments. The order in which we deal with these theologians is largely chronological. The thesis has been divided into two parts, the first of which contains a discussion of patristic and early medieval contributions to the ethics of sex. We begin with an analysis of views which theologians had expressed prior to the Pelagian controversy. In the second chapter we examine the ethical writings of Augustine of Hippo, many of which were produced in the course of this controversy. Finally, we discuss the origins and the development of the monastic tradition. The second part of the thesis has been divided into three sections. The first of these deals with three of the medieval theologians who discussed matters relevant to the ethics of sex. The next section introduces the poets and others who developed the theme of courtly love

in more or less conscious opposition to the teachings of the church. We then examine the ethics of Thomas Aquinas who is rightly regarded as the greatest and the most systematic of the theologians that the Middle Ages produced. The thesis concludes with a summary of the relations that we have discerned between theology and ethics of sex in the patristic and medieval periods and with a brief assessment of the contemporary significance of some of our findings.

Without the help of many people I could not have produced this thesis and the introduction affords me an opportunity to acknowledge the assistance that I have received. The man to whom I am most indebted is the late Professor Ian Henderson. He was my supervisor at the University of Glasgow and he combined shrewd advice with warm affection in order to give me constant guidance and encouragement. To work with him was a great privilege. I am also bound to mention the late Professor Donald Greger Smith who treated me with much kindness while I was a student in Glasgow. He invited me to read some of the papers which formed the basis of the thesis at seminars which he conducted for graduates who were engaged in theological research. Thus he enabled me to benefit by the constructive criticism which he, his colleagues, and my fellow-students

made of my work. I am very grateful to those who were responsible for typing the thesis. Mrs. Evelyn Cruikshank of Bearsden, near Glasgow, assumed the greater part of the task and therefore deserves especial thanks. Mrs. Barbara Auldism and Mrs. Liz Jamieson typed the first copies of the last three chapters which were written after I had returned to Melbourne. In conclusion, I have to say that words are not adequate to express the gratitude which I feel towards my wife and daughters. Suffice it to say, therefore, that the love and the patience with which they have supported me would have astonished those theologians who have doubted the value of relations between the sexes.

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## SUMMARY

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The early writings of Augustine reveal that a neo-Platonic conception of moral excellence can allow for a moderate enjoyment of temporal goods, including those that the church associated with marriage. Through experience and theological reflection, however, Augustine began to appreciate the sinfulness of man and the importance of divine grace. When the Pelagians challenged

his teaching, then, he was prompted to elaborate a doctrine of original sin which cast aspersion on the sexual desire of man. His theological insights led him to qualify some of the views that others expressed on the subject of chastity but he was able to assure the anxious monks that his conception of divine grace did not conflict with their conception of Christian identity.

The monastic version of the Christian life developed from the protest which ascetics had been making against the moral laxity of the church. This confirms our view that patristic and early medieval ethics was designed largely to cope with a crisis of confidence in Christian identity. The monasteries provided the early medieval church with its leadership and so successive generations of the faithful had the ascetic pattern of virtue impressed upon them.

An improvement in social conditions led theologians of the High Middle Ages to express new confidence in human reason and greater interest in the temporal prospects of man. Anselm of Canterbury developed a theory of the atonement in which the monastic conceptions of divine justice and human obedience were extended and room was made for an appreciation of the dynamics of historical existence. Hence he found no fault in marriage. Nevertheless, he maintained the superiority of celibacy, partly because the loyalty that celibates gave to the

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From this analysis we conclude that theological principles did help to determine the patristic and medieval ethics of sex but that the most important factors were sociological.



**PART ONE**

**ETHICS AND THE PRESERVATION OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY**

THE REJECTION OF ETHICS AS LAW:  
from Tertullian to Jerome.

Our enquiry into the theological contribution to Western sex ethics finds a convenient starting point in the work of Tertullian whose attitude to sexual behaviour was both distinctive and provocative. Little is known about the early life of this African. At the close of the second century, he makes his appearance on the stage of history as a writer of theological treatises, many of which seek to defend the catholic faith against opponents such as Marcion. During the first decade of the third century, however, he became a convert to the sect founded by Montanus, and so began to propound views which were contrary to those accepted by most catholics. The chief characteristics of the short-lived Montanist movement<sup>1</sup> will become apparent in the course of our investigation into Tertullian's work. Despite the gulf which separates catholic from Montanist belief, Tertullian's conversion did not signify a radical break with former views. On the contrary, it represented a clarification of outlook and hence produced a more settled and rigid statement of ideas which were already present in his earlier writings. (Sometimes, therefore, it is difficult to decide whether a particular work belongs to his pre-Montanist or Montanist period).

1. Although Montanism did not survive long as an independent sect, there were certain groups in the African church of the fifth century which still regarded Tertullian as their theological authority.

This consistency enables us to treat his work as a systematic whole within which development could, and did, take place.

In his work On Exhortation to Chastity, Tertullian introduces us to some essential elements in his theology. With Ephesians 4:4 ff. clearly in mind, he writes; 'There is "one God, one faith", one discipline too'.<sup>2</sup> In order to appreciate the role which he assigns to discipline, we must first consider the ethical potential of Tertullian's understanding of God and faith. This will also serve to clarify the question of the relationship between theology and ethics in the thought of Tertullian.

Tertullian believed that the foundation of reality was matter. God had created a world whose two basic elements were different forms of material. There is 'heavenly material' (the realm of spirit) and 'on earthly material' (The realm of flesh).<sup>3</sup> This view of the world was quite common in the age of Tertullian and it usually produced a deterministic ethical scheme. The individual could not transcend the cleavage in reality and his manner of existence was, therefore, subject to the ruling principle of the realm to which he belonged. This tendency is most evident in Tertullian's Montanist writings. Thus, in his On Monogamy, he refers to his fellow-sectarians as those 'whom the recognition of spiritual gifts entitles to be deservedly called Spiritual' and states that 'the still shameless "infirmity of the flesh" 'may decide for itself whether the disciplines revealed by the Holy Spirit are burdensome'.<sup>4</sup> Although

2. De Exhortatione Castitatis, vii.

3. Ad Exorem, I, iv.

4. De Monogamia, i; iii.

Tertullian divides mankind into two camps, however, his conception of God as Creator saves him from extreme dualism and consequent determinism by enabling him to posit a continuity between the realms of spirit and flesh. No Manichean, for example, would have accepted his view that the unity of the flesh in marriage implies a spiritual unity.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he does doubt if God created all the elements of reality. In the work On Female Dress he suggests that man's ability to fashion ornaments may have been the work 'of the sinful angels'.<sup>6</sup> Clearly then, the antinomy of spirit and flesh offers Tertullian ample opportunity for an ethic of world-denial.<sup>7</sup>

While God's creating work sets the stage for man's exercise of responsibility by establishing the realms of spirit and flesh, the revelation of his will establishes the specific claims of the spiritual realm upon man.<sup>8</sup> God's fundamental relation to man-in-the-world (homo viator) is, therefore, that of a lawgiver, and his chief characteristic is, therefore, justice.<sup>9</sup>

5. Ad. Ux. II, viii.

6. De Cultu Feminarum II, x ; cf. I, ii ff.

7. cf. A. Nygren, Agape And Eros (transl. Watson), S.P.C.K., 1953 pp.336-342. In the course of this discussion of Tertullian, it is claimed that his rejection of a non-physical soul implies that there is no affinity between man and the Godhead and hence, that his legalism is a sufficient explanation of his suspicion of the 'flesh' (pp.337 ff.) This overlooks both the cosmic scope of Tertullian's materialism and its ethical implications. Augustine drew attention to the former in his work On The Soul and its Origin (II, v, 9) where he refers to 'the ravings of Tertullian' who makes the soul like God, corporeal. Moreover, one of the portions into which Tertullian divides mankind has an affinity with the (material) Spirit which enables it to rule the flesh in a manner which was not possible even for the disciples (De Monog. xiv, referring to Matthew 26:41). If Tertullian's legalism only partly explains his sex ethics, however, it does more fully explain his strong sense of divine transcendence which Nygren has rightly emphasised. This aspect of his thought is both the theological source and expression of his restless quest for Christian identity (v.inf. esp. pp. 26 ff.) The root cause of Nygren's over-simplifications lies in his conviction that his theological theme requires him to focus attention on 'purely theological' rather than ethical works - he does not, for example, refer to Tertullian's treatises on monogamy, chastity or modesty.

8. e.g. De Exhort. Cast. i ff.

9. e.g. De Pudicitia, ii.

Discovery of his laws, however, is difficult. Scripture is the primary source of these laws and, hence, is always the basis of Tertullian's exposition of the will of God.<sup>10</sup> In particular, it contains 'the law which is properly ours - that is . . . the gospel'.<sup>11</sup> However, enthusiasm for the laws which he thought he had discovered never blinded Tertullian to the difficulty of eliciting a clear set of laws from Scripture. Severe meditation is required in order to discover 'what even in secret He may will'.<sup>12</sup> And, quite apart from the problem of God's secret will, there is the difficulty of reconciling different statements on the same subject. For Tertullian shared the faith of the patristic church in the unity of Scripture, a unity which was thought to require non-contradiction. Because he was convinced that Paul sought to prohibit remarriage of the widowed, therefore, Tertullian has to spend a great deal of time explaining away Paul's statements to the contrary. For 'the Apostle must not be found self contradictory'.<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian also tries to find evidence of God's will in historical events. Thus, accepting the Biblical view that death is subject to the will of God (e.g. Matt. 10; 28), he points out that when one spouse dies 'the marriage likewise, by the will of God, deceases'. From this he infers that remarriage of the surviving partner is forbidden; had God desired marriage for this person, he would not have concluded the first

10. De Pud. vi - 'I prefer to derive my discipline from Christ'; written in the Montanist period.
11. De Monog. viii.
12. De Exhort. Cast. ii.
13. De Monog. xi.



alliance.<sup>14</sup> The argument is hardly conclusive, and when Tertullian hastens to add that some events, remarriage for example, cannot be referred to the will of God, it becomes apparent that history establishes laws with even less clarity and certainty than Scripture. We may be sure that Tertullian's quest for an effective promulgator of God's will played an important part in his adoption of Montanism. With the members of this sect he could share the conviction that nobody became 'holy before the manifestation of the Holy Spirit from Heaven, the Determiner of discipline itself'.<sup>15</sup> We can almost hear a sigh of relief as he writes the final phrase.

Since the Holy Spirit and not the resurrection establishes holiness, we may infer that God's work in Christ and faith therein is not ethically constitutive. So Tertullian tells us that the 'clemency of God, preferring the repentance of the sinner to his death, looks at such as are ignorant still, and still unbelieving, for the sake of whose liberation Christ came; not (at such) as already know God, and have learned the sacrament of faith'.<sup>16</sup>

14. e.g. *Ad Ux.* I. vii ; *De Exhort.* Cast. ii. In logical terms, the argument is circular, for it presupposes the implication of death; in historical terms, it is tendentious for it selects those events it deems significant and ignores others. Tertullian admits this; not everything in history - second marriages for instance - may be referred to the will of God. Such 'selectivity' was deep-rooted in the early and patristic church. It takes its origin from the fact that the Bible, the record of truly significant history, ignores the bulk of universal history. v. P. Brown, *Augustine Of Hippo*, Faber & Faber, London, 1967, pp. 314 ff., esp. pp. 318 f.

15. *De Pud.* xi.

16. *Ibid.*, xviii.

In other words Tertullian refuses to claim finality for God's revelation in Christ. It does not, for him, set forth the vision of grace as the ultimate character of life. Rather, as the term clemency itself suggests, it anticipates the revelation of his justice in the era of the 'New Prophecy'.<sup>17</sup> In the realm of justice, clemency is wanting, because it would offer 'security in sin' which 'is likewise an appetite for it'.<sup>18</sup> Clemency alone, however, is insufficient to set man on the path of justice. Enlightenment too is necessary since it would be pointless to offer man a fresh start for his moral pilgrimage without establishing the conditions which made moral achievement possible. Therefore, faith signifies acceptance of the doctrines of the church summed up in the rule of faith (regula fidei) as well as the appropriation of God's once-for-all offer of clemency. The rule of faith provides an indispensable guide to truth without which man cannot begin to think or act aright.<sup>19</sup> Tertullian has transformed faith into an object - 'the faith'<sup>20</sup> - which, for all the guidance it may give to personal activity, has lost its dynamic character as an inspirational source of man's life. The springs of moral action lie elsewhere.

Tertullian's understanding of God and faith implies a specific view of the nature and proper qualities of man. Since God is pre-eminently the just law-giver, the essential character of his subjects is freedom of will. Tertullian states that 'the only thing which is in our power is volition'.<sup>21</sup> Free-will is an inalienable possession of man, something

17. e.g. De Monog. xiv.

18. De Pud. ix.

19. v. esp. De Praescriptione Haereticorum, xiff.

20. e.g. De Pud. xviii.

21. De Exhort. Cast. ii.

which 'has its source in ourselves' since God bestowed it upon Adam.<sup>22</sup>

This means that sin cannot penetrate the centre of man's being and enslave the will. The agony of man's moral impotence to which Paul gives expression in Romans 7, has not been felt by Tertullian. Sin can only trap man by placing an external constraint upon him. Thus, as a result of Adam's sin, men were subjected to ignorance and sinned because of the limitation of their knowledge, not because sin became a determining factor in their lives. As Tertullian puts it, they were 'natural sinners' - as opposed to 'voluntary',<sup>23</sup> - and therefore suffered the second consequence of Adam's sin - death as a punishment.<sup>24</sup> Hence the work of Christ is reduced to removing the external constraints upon man in order that he may exercise his power to obey the law.

This confidence in man's autonomous capacity to achieve his own destiny is the necessary presupposition of a legalistic ethic. It leads inexorably to the conclusion that man can avoid sin altogether. Thus Tertullian can claim that, Christ being once for all dead, none who, subsequently to Christ, has died, can live again to sin, and especially to so heinous a sin 'as fornication or adultery'.<sup>25</sup> In the context of this statement, the final phrase functions as a qualifier and so betrays a degree of unease in Tertullian's support for the monstrous error of perfectionism. He was aware that the New Testament provides no clear justification for his doctrine. He seeks to maintain it by reference

22. Ibid.

23. De Pud. x.

24. De Exhort. Cast. ii.

25. De Pud. xvii.

to the first letter of John which, with its reference to mortal and non-mortal sin and advocacy of both sinlessness and confession of sin, is admirably suited to his purpose.<sup>26</sup> In other words, he can only maintain his view by radically dividing the concept of sin. Of the two classes of sins, only those committed against one's 'brother' are forgiveable.<sup>27</sup> Sins against God cannot be forgiven since they constitute a voluntary rejection of His claim upon man and, we have seen, the Christian may not presume upon His clemency.<sup>28</sup> However, with the New Testament probably in mind again, Tertullian hesitates to say that God will never repeat his clemency.<sup>29</sup> This enables him to demand penance for mortal sin without having to compromise his view of the Church as a perfect, and so exclusive, society. The legalistic tendency to view persons solely in terms of fixed categories is apparent here; it has been reinforced by the deterministic influence of Tertullian's materialism. A man's ethical

26. Ibid. xix; cf. 1 John. 5:13ff.; 3: 4ff; but cf. 1: 5ff.; 2:1ff.. Attempts to 'reconcile' the treatment of sin in this epistle with the conception of mankind's continuing solidarity 'in Adam' elsewhere in the New Testament, especially in the Pauline corpus (e.g. Romans 5-7, 1 Corinthians 15:20 ff.) have never been eminently successful. J.C. O'Neill, has recently suggested that both the form and content of the letter reveal that a convert to Christianity has woven faith's comments into a treasured document of the Jewish sect to which he formerly belonged. (v. J.C. O'Neill, The Puzzle Of 1 John, London, S.P.C.K. 1966) In other words, the epistle may be largely 'pre-Christian' according to the judgment of critical scholarship as well as of theology. Whatever the judgment of other New Testament scholars may be, this thesis can derive nothing but support from the manner in which legalistic minds such as Tertullian's have since used the epistle.
27. De Pud. ii. There is little doubt that Tertullian here means the Christian 'brother' only. For, other considerations apart, the non-Christian would not admit that the church was entitled to forgive the sin which one of its members committed against himself. Also, v. A. Nygren, op. cit., pp.345 ff., who points out that Tertullian regarded love for one's enemies as irrational and so no part of Christian duty, and cf. inf. pp.18f. on the manner in which a Christian convert may 'influence' her Gentile husband.
28. De Pud. ii; ix; xviii.
29. Ibid. iii; xviii; xxi.

status is defined according to his awareness, acceptance, or rejection of the claims of spiritual matter (the Holy Spirit). He is thus either a 'natural sinner', a 'Spiritual', or a mortal sinner and heretic.<sup>30</sup> This blindness to personal realities is heightened by the division of sin into two types. For this presupposes a God who is little concerned about sin in so far as it is directed against one's brother and so denies the importance of human society and of man's inhumanity to man.<sup>31</sup>

Tertullian denies that his ethic represents a return to Pharisaic legalism. 'It is the "yokes" of "works" that have been rejected, not those of disciplines'.<sup>32</sup> In the context of his ethical system, this statement may well appear to be a meaningless quibble about words. However, it does carry some significance since, in contrast with some versions of legalistic ethics, Tertullian places little emphasis on the

30. Since heresy means the voluntary denial of truth already known, it is an immoral act as well as an intellectual failure. Herein lies the basis for the moral aspersions which continued to be cast upon the heretic throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

31. This social unconcern is merely an outward manifestation of failure to appreciate mankind's solidarity - in this case, in sin, v. further, inf. pp. 25. As well as this loss of the sense of human solidarity, Tertullian's division of sin into two categories is inherently absurd for it suggests that sin's gravity has nothing to do with the harm done to the neighbour. Sexual crimes (and murder) are especially bad because they directly oppose the will of God - which also implies that some sins do not - not because they are extreme instances of inhumanity. Seen from the latter perspective, the difference between criminal and civil offences appears to be merely one of degree and, hence, the validity of capital punishment becomes extremely dubious. It should be noted, however, that the insistence of a theological ethic upon man's solidarity in sin does not exclude distinction between the gravity of various sins. Augustine was keenly aware of this. v. P. Brown, op. cit., esp. pp. 244-251.

32. De Pud. vi.



notion of reward. It is certainly present in the picture of heaven which, together with the picture of hell - the sanction against law-breakers - Tertullian's materialism enables him to portray vividly.<sup>33</sup> But this same materialism supports a view of fixed moral states which leave little room for different degrees of achievement and reward. Either one is holy or one is not. This carries the further implication that man's reward is implicitly present with his state, even though he remains free to alter both. Hence man is conceived to be on 'probation' rather than earning rewards in this life.<sup>34</sup>

Faith, then, works through discipline, rather than love according to Tertullian and, in face of the promise of a heavenly reward, life is conceived in wholly utilitarian terms. The notion of intrinsic value with its power to inspire the moral life is sacrificed for the burden of obligation.<sup>35</sup> However, as soon as we ask what are the duties of the sexual life we discover that Tertullian complicates matters by introducing a concept of grace. God's grace consists in his liberality in giving specific gifts to individuals, virginity being chief among such endowments.<sup>36</sup> Tertullian would appear to have been forced to recognise the glory of virginity by the growing testimony of the church<sup>37</sup> since not

33. De Spectaculis, xxx.

34. De Exhort. Cast. viii.

35. v. E. Brunner, The Divine Imperative (trans. Wyon), Lutterworth, London, 1937, pp. 38-43 where it is pointed out that this deficiency is inherent in legalism.

36. e.g. Ad. Ux. I, viii; De Exhort. Cast. i ; De Virginibus Velandis, x.

37. This rise of ascetic feeling is particularly evident in the character of the sects, and the Montanists were no exception to the general tendency.

only is it out of harmony with the rest of his thought but he does not hesitate to draw attention to the fact. On the basis of I. Corinthians, 7: 1, he is prepared to allow that the virgin's is 'the principal sanctity because it is free from affinity with fornication'.<sup>38</sup> However, he contrasts virginity unfavourably with the continence of men, the widowed, or married couples who have 'renounced the common disgrace' of sexual intercourse.<sup>39</sup> Chastity is easy for the virgin because she has tasted neither desire nor its fruits against either or both of which others have to fight. What she has received 'by grace', they have achieved 'by virtue'.<sup>40</sup>

Tertullian's account of virginity shows how little room his ethic allows even for a severely reduced concept of grace. By elevating a few fortunate individuals beyond the disciplinary struggle grace introduces inequity into his system. Moreover, although he does not subscribe to the view that the virgin has a higher reward in heaven, or that she is a model of the Christian life in matters of sex,<sup>41</sup> Tertullian does support the ambivalent view of grace implied in the church's estimate of virginity. When grace is assigned to a specific category or persons its gift-character is compromised because an individual may now join the favoured group and so appropriate it. It is reduced from a form of endowment to a special offer. The fiction that this is still a matter of grace can only be maintained by introducing ambivalence into the

38. De Exhort. Cast. ix.

39. De Virg. Vel. x.

40. Ad. Ux. I, viii.

41. As will many of his successors, v. inf. pp. 35f., 46f., 56f..

account of the fortunate group. As a generalization, it is probably true that those whose sexual desire has not been experientially aroused have less difficulty in restraining it. However, the notion of grace demands that the virgin have little or no difficulty since her chastity is conceived to be, either partly or wholly, a gift.<sup>42</sup> Hence Tertullian also upholds the myth of female sexual passivity. Ovid, who lived two centuries before Tertullian, knew better.

Like all patristic theologians, Tertullian makes no attempt to produce a systematic account of the ethics of sex, but confines his

42. Most later theologians will prefer the view that virginity is not entirely the product of grace, v. inf. pp. 46, 54f.. This merely makes the ambivalence more obvious. This conception of virginity as the path to eternal happiness, (v. De Exhort. Cast. i; cf. Cyprian, De Habitu Virginum, xxii; Ambrose, De Virginibus, I, iii, 11; v, 20; ix, 52; Jerome, Adversus Jovinianus, I, xxxvi), forms a striking parallel with the classical conception of virtue as the path to an essentially social ideal of happiness. Just as the latter required the assistance of 'fortune' (v. C.N. Cochrane, Christianity And Classical Culture, O.U.P., London, 1944, esp. pp. 99f., 155-160, 167-169) so the former required the assistance of 'grace' which is conceived as a similarly capricious, yet determining, force. The understanding of virginity, then, is a measure of the patristic church's failure to free itself from classical categories of thought for, as Augustine was almost alone in seeing, the Biblical conception of grace offered the only sure solution to the impasse implicit in the collapse of the Empire and its ideals (v. Cochrane, op. cit., Part III, and N.B. esp. pp. 367 f. on the significance of the work of Athanasius).

attention to matters of current concern.<sup>43</sup> His motive for writing was often polemical and this, together with his legalistic approach, partly explains the negative character of his stated views. A deeper reason for this however, may be discovered in his cosmology. He denies that sexual bipolarity has any part in the realm of spiritual matter. The male is the true form of man and the female is merely a derivative form of the earthly realm, Eve being made from the rib of Adam.<sup>44</sup>

This presupposition has immediate and disastrous consequences for Tertullian's appreciation of sexual behaviour, marriage and woman.

43. This 'moralistic' approach, all the more evident by comparison with the exhaustive treatment given to theological matters of dispute, notably the nature of the Trinity, has led many scholars to assume that patristic ethics is quite haphazard, cf. e.g. D.S. Bailey, The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought, Longmans, 1959, p. 19: 'no dispute arose of such magnitude as to demand a thorough and systematic treatment of the theological principles governing marriage and sexual relationship'; P.L. Lehmann, Ethics In A Christian Context, S.C.M. London, 1963, pp. 35-37; the term 'ethics' was not used in a Christian treatise until Basil of Caesarea's 'The Principles of Ethics' appears in A.D. 361, and the approach to problems 'is not only unsystematic; but in so far as presuppositions are evident, they seem to be drawn as much from Platonic, Stoic, and monastic ethical reflection as from the Bible'. Bailey too, acknowledges that such presuppositions were operative (v. pp. 4-6) but prefers not to emphasize them as this could upset his predilection to treat the Fathers as 'psychological studies' (p. 50) and so require him to treat their claims more seriously. Had Lehmann paused to consider the extent to which their presence reflects on the 'unsystematic' treatment of moral 'problems', he might have appreciated that the occasional approach provides insufficient basis for an inference that no systematic ethical perspective is presupposed. After all, the presuppositions he notes are also present in the more apparently systematic theological works of the age. While, then, the validity of our claim that the ethics of the patristic (and medieval) church is essentially systematic cannot be established until our analysis is completed, prior grounds for this assumption are not wholly wanting.
44. De. Cult. Fem. I, ii ; cf. Ad. Ux. I, ii; De Exhort. Cast. v. The argument is patently tendentious since it refuses to enquire into the significance of ascribing Eve's creation to God and of stating that the work of creation was incomplete without her. v. Genesis 1; 26 f.; 2:18.

Man, according to Tertullian, is obliged to use this life as a preparation for his translation to a unisexual spiritual realm. Therefore the bisexuality of this world, together with the activity which results from it, not only lacks intrinsic value but threatens to undermine man's performance of his duty and attainment of his destiny.<sup>45</sup> Faith stands in opposition to 'the necessities of the flesh',<sup>46</sup> and so, also, to concupiscence or the desire to satisfy such needs.<sup>47</sup> Tertullian describes concupiscence as 'a vicious passion of the mind',<sup>48</sup> and divides it into two general categories.<sup>49</sup> There is a 'filthy' fleshly concupiscence<sup>50</sup> which manifests itself primarily in sexual activity or 'the trade of voluptuousness',<sup>51</sup> and a worldly concupiscence which may take the form of ambition, the immoderate desire of possessions,<sup>52</sup> or vainglory, which parades them before others.<sup>53</sup> Despite his views on free will and virginity which deny that sin or immoderate desire have become part of the structure of the human being, Tertullian occasionally gives the impression that concupiscence, especially the fleshly variety, is a determining factor of existence. Thus he exhorts the man of faith to circumscribe it,<sup>54</sup> and elsewhere, says that 'the virus of lust was universally inherent' in Adam.<sup>55</sup> In neither case, however, does

45. e.g. De Exhort. Cast. xiii - Paradise is 'intact' from sexual intercourse and, therefore, those who desire to enter should, in this life, 'begin to cease' from it.

46. De Exhort. Cast. i.

47. Ad Ux. II, viii.

48. De Cult. Fem. I, ix.

49. Ad Ux. I, iv.

50. De Exhort. Cast. x.

51. De Cult., Fem. II, xi; cf. II, iii.

52. Ibid, I, ix.

53. Ibid, II, xi ; cf. II, iii. This, of course, is not an exhaustive list of the types of sin which arise from 'worldly concupiscence'.

54. De Monog. iii; xv. This is part of the argument by which he justifies first marriage in face of the question why the Spirit does not now 'impose . . . a final bridle upon the flesh' and dissolve marriage altogether (iii) v. inf. p.17 .

55. De Pud. vi.

he go so far as to limit human freedom to avoid sin.<sup>56</sup> As far as Tertullian is concerned, these statements indicate only the extent of his antipathy to sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, they do suggest a view of fallen humanity which someone with a deeper understanding of original sin, say an Augustine, might develop.

Part, at least, of what distinguishes marriage from other forms of personal relationship is its sexual character.<sup>57</sup> In this, Tertullian estimates it no more highly than any other kind of sexual activity.

'It is laws which seem to make the difference between marriage and fornication, through diversity of illicitness, not through the nature of the thing itself'.<sup>58</sup> In other words, marriage is not justified by its intrinsic value for those who enter upon it, but by considerations external to it. For the most part, these consist in considerations adduced from Scripture, especially the New Testament.<sup>59</sup> For even in his Montanist period, Tertullian could affirm, 'I prefer to derive (my) discipline from Christ'.<sup>60</sup> What settles the question of monogamous marriage 'for us', he says, is that it is 'in accordance with the sacrament of Christ' or his spiritual marriage to the Church.<sup>61</sup> Although

56. That would have undermined both the legalistic form and the perfectionist intention of his ethic.

57. e.g. De Exhort. Cast. ix; De Virg. xi.

58. De Exhort. Cast. ix.

59. e.g. the creation and monogamy of Adam and Eve; Noah; the pairing of the animals in the ark; Zechariah, the priest (Luke 1: 5ff.); Jesus' teaching (e.g. Matthew 19: 1-12); his mother's example; the regulations for bishops in the Pastorals (v. esp. 1 Timothy 3: 1 ff.). v. e.g. De Exhort. Cast. v. : De Monog. iv ff. Other Scriptural directives and examples appear in the text. Most of them, like those given here, are primarily oriented to the question of remarriage, v. inf. p. 20.

60. De Pud. vi.

61. De Exhort. Cast. v.



Scripture offers reasonably clear support for marriage, Tertullian's notion of holiness leads him to ask why the Holy Spirit does not 'impose ... a final bridle upon the flesh, no longer obliquely calling us away from marriage, but openly'. His reply is to recall the Spirit's 'character of Comforter, in that He excuses your infirmity from (the stringency of) an absolute continence'.<sup>62</sup> Thus he transforms the Pauline concession to the spirit<sup>63</sup> into a concession to the flesh.

Despite his condescending statements about marriage, Tertullian's materialism provides a notably un-Scriptural basis for stressing the unity of husband and wife. Their spiritual unity, which is implied in the unity of the flesh,<sup>64</sup> cannot be abrogated in eternity and so they are raised 'to a spiritual consortship'<sup>65</sup> (cf. Mark 12:18-27 and /s). This conception provides the background for the tender picture of marriage as a mutual life of Christian service which he paints in his letter to his wife.<sup>66</sup> To claim that this 'breathes the rarefied air of the cloister',<sup>67</sup>

62. De Monog. iii.

63. 1 Corinthians 7: 1-7.

64. Ad Ux. II, viii.

65. De Monog. x.

66. Ad Ux. II, viii.

67. D.S. Bailey, op. cit., p. 24. Certainly the stress is almost entirely upon mutuality in Christian service but, surely, there is no harm in that! Bailey tends to approach the patristic writers much as they approached the Bible, namely, looking for proof-texts. Apart from his concern to dismiss them as 'psychological cases' (v. sup. p. 14 n. 43) he also wants to emphasise that 'they made no attempt to work out any satisfactory doctrine of the one-flesh relationship' (p. 19) which he considers fundamental to the distinctive character of the Christian view of sex (v. esp. ch. VII). Unfortunately, this leads him to pass over what they do say concerning the unity of the flesh, as here, or to undervalue it, as in his discussion of Augustine (v. pp. 90 ff. and cf. inf. p. 114 )

not only ignores what Tertullian says concerning unity of the flesh, but suggests a view of marriage which allows time for nothing but sexual activity.

The sharp division between the realms of spiritual and earthly matter takes effect in Tertullian's refusal to allow marriage between a Christian and a 'Gentile' (or non-believer) and his view that non-Christians do not contract proper marriages. The former position is argued largely on the basis of 1 Corinthians, 7.<sup>68</sup> Only the case of the woman is considered,<sup>69</sup> and Tertullian supports the Pauline statement with a list of the difficulties which will ensue from bondage to a heathen husband.<sup>70</sup> Dangers such as the husband's desire that his wife make herself attractive or take part in heathen rites do not, however, accrue to the woman who is converted after her marriage to a heathen. Therefore, she must obey the apostle's injunction to remain with her husband. She will become a 'terror' to her Gentile husband', who, in her conversion and changed character, will discern 'visible proofs of some marked (divine) regard'. Hence he will be 'less ready to annoy her' and 'by his fear, a candidate for God'.<sup>71</sup> This attempt to rationalize Paul's teaching in order to derive a fixed law from it, succeeds

68. v. esp. *Ad Ux.* II, ii f. , cf. *De Monog.* xi.

69. This cannot be explained simply by the fact that his major treatment of the question occurs in the letter to his wife, since the section in '*On Monogamy*' is the same in this respect. Probably it is due to 1 Corinthians I: 39f. (cf. vv. 8f. with their specific reference to widows). We should also remember that widows, often young, greatly outnumbered widowers in the early and, to a lesser extent, the patristic Church, v.c.g. 1 Timothy, 5: 3-16.

70. *Ad Ux.* II, iv. 2f.

71. *Ibid.*, II, vii.

only in losing the apostle's keen sense and flexible treatment of reality. His concern for 'peace' enabled him to see that circumstances could demand either separation or cohabitation.<sup>72</sup> The manner in which Tertullian attempts his rationalization reveals the fear which is the basis of life in confrontation with divine justice, as well as the fear of those who could make life, according to the law, difficult.

Since marriage, according to Tertullian, 'is when God joins "two in one flesh"; or else, finding (them already) joined in the same flesh, has given His seal to the conjunction',<sup>73</sup> the former 'marriage' of a convert does not prevent him 'remarrying' a Christian.<sup>74</sup> This is as close as Tertullian the Montanist will come to allowing remarriage. Not surprisingly, in view of his fundamental principles, many of the arguments which he employs against remarriage would apply equally against first marriage.

(i) Remarriage is due either to fleshly or to worldly concupiscence.<sup>75</sup> But so is first marriage which, even in his pre-Montanist letter to his wife, Tertullian could describe as sufficient to appease all such concupiscence in believers.<sup>76</sup>

(ii) For the Christian, the command to multiply no longer applies, due to the "extremity of the times".<sup>77</sup>

(iii) Attention to fleshly desires dulls a man's spirit and prevents his approaching and receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>78</sup> Only one who is free from the marriage-bond can attend truly to prayer.<sup>79</sup>

72. 1 Corinthians, 7: 12-16 (N.B. v.15 - εἰρηνη )

73. De Monog. ix.

74. Ibid. xi.

75. Ad. Ux. I, iv.

76. Ibid. I, v.

77. De Monog. vii.; Ad. Ux. I, v; De Exhort. Cast. xii.

78. De Exhort. Cast, x.

79. Ibid, x; vii.

(iv) Referring to I Corinthians 7, Tertullian states that unless the Christian attends to God's 'superior volition' he will 'savour of contrariety' and 'rather offend than merit reward'.<sup>80</sup> However, while he admits that Paul is deprecating first marriage, Tertullian adduces verse 40 to prove that the authority of the Holy Spirit forbids only second marriage.<sup>81</sup>

Even the Pastoral epistles do not absolutely forbid remarriage of the widowed and Tertullian's desire for Scriptural support drives him to extreme arguments. As well as citing many Old Testament examples of monogamy, he points to the report that the animals entered the ark in pairs.<sup>82</sup> Romans 7: 1-3 is explained away with the help of vv. 4-7 - the 'law' of the first three verses is abolished for the Christian.<sup>83</sup> Referring to the Pastorals, he claims, against the catholics, that if monogamy is only required in the bishops, then the other virtues mentioned must apply only to them too.<sup>84</sup> A basic reason for rejecting digamy is the notion of eternal consortship, based on his materialism.<sup>85</sup> Other reasons include the fear of licence or numerous remarriages<sup>86</sup> and the need to maintain good appearances,<sup>87</sup> especially as the Gentiles frequently reject remarriage.<sup>88</sup> Finally, the need for clear promulgation of the law leads him to claim that his view is the revelation of the Holy Spirit,

80. Ibid, iii.

81. Ibid, iv. I Corinthians 7: 40: 'But in my judgment, she is happier if she remains as she is (i.e. a widow). And I think (sic) that I have the Spirit of God'.

82. v. sup. p. 16 note 59.

83. De Monog. xiii.

84. Ibid, xii.

85. Ibid, x. and v. sup. p. 17.

86. Ibid, xi : cf. De Exhort. Cast. ix.

87. De Monog. i ; xvii; cf. De Cult. Fem. II, xiii (concerning modesty).

88. Ad. Ux. I, vi ; De Exhort. Cast. xiii; De Monog. xvii.

an element in the Montanist 'new Prophecy'.<sup>89</sup>

Tertullian spends little time considering either the needs of the widow or the positive role which she may play in the church or society. This can be partly explained by the polemical character of his writings on the subject. However, it also reflects the manner in which a legal code fails to penetrate the heart of personal life and rests content with external adherence to the law. Thus, even though law may have the creation and maintenance of society in view, it is not itself sufficient to guarantee either. It may prescribe various forms of social behaviour, but it nevertheless addresses the isolated individual and cannot impel him beyond a utilitarian view of his relationship with other people. When law is conceived to provide the basis for man's destiny and not for society, its tendency to individualism and lack of social and personal concern is inevitably magnified. Hence Tertullian not only frames a rigorous law but fails to demand support for those who must bear it.

For a society which encouraged the view that woman's primary role is child-bearing and which managed to produce a relatively high proportion of young widows,<sup>90</sup> Tertullian's account of marriage is clearly anti-feminine. We could not have expected otherwise from someone who conceived woman to be a secondary form of humanity.<sup>91</sup> However, we have yet to exhaust this

89. De Monog. xiv.

90. v.e.g. 1 Timothy, 2: 8-15 and 5: 3-16. That the former reflects the 'common view' is apparent from verse 10: 'as befits women who profess religion (θεοσεβειαν)'.

91. v. sup. p. 14.

attack on the feminine principle.

Woman is not just a lesser form of human being. She is morally inferior to man. Every woman shares the guilt of Eve in being the cause of human perdition.<sup>92</sup> That this was no mere flight of theological fancy may be inferred from Tertullian's remark to the virgin: 'All ages are perilled in your person'.<sup>93</sup> Woman stands before man as the cause of, and continuing lure to, sin. Tertullian's basic solution to this problem is to inculcate in her a form of modesty which will crush her femininity.

The salvation of man as well as woman requires modesty<sup>94</sup> but Tertullian addresses nearly all that he has to say on this subject to the latter. Since 'properly the use and fruit of beauty is voluptuousness', Tertullian concludes that 'not merely must the pageantry of fictitious and elaborate beauty be rejected by you; but that of even natural grace must be obliterated by concealment and negligence, as equally dangerous to the glances of (the beholder's) eyes'.<sup>95</sup>

Tertullian treats modesty with much the same emphasis on external adherence as we noted in his discussions of widowhood. 'Why does not my garb preannounce my character...?'<sup>96</sup> 'To Christian modesty it is not enough to be so, but to seem so too'.<sup>97</sup> The desire to make separation from the world the basis of Christian witness to the world lies behind this claim. Its purpose is 'that malice have no access at all to you, or that you may be an example and testimony to the evil'.<sup>98</sup>

- 92. De Cult., Fem. I, i.
- 93. De Virg. Vel. xvi.
- 94. De Cult., Fem. II, i.
- 95. Ibid, II, ii.
- 96. Ibid, II, xii.
- 97. Ibid, II, xiii.
- 98. Ibid.

The Christian cannot rest content with that 'hidden' identity to which Matthew's Gospel, among other New Testament writings, refers, but must make himself 'the light of the world'.<sup>99</sup> This distortion of Christian identity leads to that self-confidence in what is possessed 'in the flesh'. Hence Tertullian can say of Christian modesty that 'even from outside it may gaze, as it were, upon its own furniture'.<sup>100</sup>

The psychological basis of Tertullian's view of modesty (and chastity) is fear of anything in creation which could possibly divert man from pursuit of his goal, which is salvation. The Christian, especially the Christian woman, should avoid everything which invites to sin, and live in the hope that the gift of faith will continue, not in the presumption that it will. 'Fear is the foundation of salvation; presumption is an impediment to fear'.<sup>101</sup> An ethic which presupposes man's ability to achieve his own destiny necessarily gives rise to human anxiety. For, in order to embrace the whole of life, it must set man's goal in the future and so forever beyond his reach. In face of the consequent despair of success and fear of hindrance, its only remedy is to 'fence' an increasing area of reality. Thus all such ethics, including those built upon the concept of

99. e.g. Matthew 6: 1ff.; cf. 5: 13ff. In other words, Tertullian's legalism leads to a one-sided interpretation of the Biblical notion of the necessity of good works. Whereas Matthew recognised that these were a response to the divine promises and so could not be 'paraded' before men, Tertullian did not. v. further, *inf.* p. 24.

100. *De Cult.*, *Fem.* II, xiii.

101. *Ibid.*, II, ii.



law, tend towards puritanism, diminishing the scope of human responsibility by placing more and more human qualities and activities under a tabu. Tertullian's rejection of remarriage and even natural beauty provide evidence of this 'creeping puritanism' which lies at the heart of an ethic of law.

The danger of this Puritanism to the church and its faith rests on the fact that it is at once very close to the Christian understanding of a man's responsibility for his neighbour while also very far removed from it. One can 'approach' one's neighbour, wittingly or unwittingly, in such a way as to entice him to treat himself and others (including yourself) irresponsibly. But to guard against this risk by either shunning social intercourse or donning the mask of virtue is itself irresponsible and an invitation to irresponsibility. It either denies responsibility for the neighbour altogether, or else refuses to deal with him honestly, i.e., is artificial, because it is presumptuous - I can only 'approach' him having first 'announced' my virtue. But the Christian has no 'virtue' of which to boast (1 Corinthians, 1: 26ff., Phillipians, 3: 3ff.) Thus Paul's conception of the illegitimacy of boasting about one's own virtue<sup>102</sup> ceases to have direct significance for the manner in which the Christian deals with others and is, instead, referred primarily to the individual as a reminder that he is in via, having yet to complete the course of virtue. This, in turn, justifies a form of 'boasting' by which the individual hopes to minimize the danger of failure.<sup>103</sup>

102. e.g. Rom. 3: 27. cf., Phil. 3: 2 ff. concerning those who 'mutilate the flesh' and 'put confidence in the flesh'. Clearly, this teaching is 'Pauline' even if it is not Paul's!

103. In other word, boasting is, yet is not, excluded.

All legal systems tend to erect a hierarchy of offences and to divide them into two groups - for example, criminal and civil, or mortal and not mortal.<sup>104</sup> For Tertullian, adultery and fornication 'are such as to hold the culminating place among crimes.'<sup>105</sup> He bases this claim upon the weighty denunciations of the adulterer and fornicator in both Old and New Testaments. Little consideration is paid to the harm which such actions may do to the neighbour - either the 'other' or a third party.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, this rigid division of sin into two categories destroys the notion of man's solidarity in sin. Being thus absolved from the recognition that, however heinous and deserving of severe punishment his crime, the criminal reflects the common plight of humanity, truly holy men will feel bound to banish him from their company forever. So too will the God of justice, although his future clemency remains a faint possibility.<sup>107</sup> Once again, his bias against human sexuality has led Tertullian into a position which is inconsistent with the Scriptural basis it claims. He is forced to gloss over all the other types of sin mentioned by Paul which, not because they are especially horrid, but just because they are sin, 'will not inherit the kingdom of God.'<sup>108</sup>

104. v. sup. pp. 8f. concerning Tertullian's use of 1 John, 5: 13ff. etc.

105. De Pud, i.

106. This criticism applies also to his treatment of murder, which, together with idolatry, completes the list of sins which are especially 'against God', v. De Pud, v.

107. v. sup. p. 9.

108. Galatians, 5: 19 ff.. Despite his ultimate reference to the Holy Spirit as the source of divine law, then, Tertullian's preference for 'Christ' as the authority (De Pud, vi) brings about the most damaging threat to any legal system, lack of clear promulgation of the laws.

Tertullian's ethic arises from a complex of theological and historical forces which were operative in the early patristic church. Although the canon of Scripture was not yet finally determined,<sup>109</sup> most of the Christian communities possessed the bulk of what is now the New Testament. These writings were revered by a despised and sometimes persecuted minority group as the apostolic foundation without which it would be impossible to build and maintain a faith capable of resisting the assaults of a hostile world. We have seen that even his acceptance of Montanism did not check Tertullian's reverence for apostolic authority. In its uncertain situation, the early church sought clear guidance from its sacred writings. Hence it tended to approach them as a source of dogma and law, and it framed 'rules of faith' part of whose function was to guarantee that the writings were properly interpreted. Both the legalistic approach and the sense of an oppressive environment will have heightened the church's appreciation of the world-denying element in apostolic Christianity and so reinforced its conviction that the life of faith is scarcely compatible with the sexual life. So too will the continuing belief that the end of the world was imminent. All these factors may be noted in the work of Tertullian.<sup>110</sup> Even his materialistic ontology, whose severely undialectical character and dualistic potential are particularly evident

109. The growth of sectarianism, especially when accompanied by spirits of such integrity and intelligence as Tertullian, hastened the day when it would be.

110. For his belief in an imminent end of the world, which he shared with the Montanists, v. e.g. *Ad. Ux.* I, v ; *De Cult. Fem.* II, ix ; *De Monog.* iii. Since this belief was still shared by most catholics and does not appear likely to have been especially heightened by fear of an outbreak of persecution (v. inf.), it is unlikely that it offers an explanation of Tertullian's 'rigorism'. Certainly, this is an ethic for the last age in world history, but it is not strictly an 'interim ethic'. (References to 'the end' invariably occur when he is expounding a section of Scripture wherein such occurs. However, this is not decisive because it could be that his own conviction is the source of his interest in these passages).

in his treatment of sexual matters, reflects the common world-view of classical man<sup>111</sup> and was still deeply rooted in the church of Augustine's time.<sup>112</sup> But while the theological heritage of the church provided Tertullian with the basic elements of his thought and so established the general direction of his ethics, it did not require him to produce an ethic of uncompromising law which, in its treatment of remarriage and modesty, implicitly rejected sex altogether. The reason for his acceptance of Montanism must be sought elsewhere.

Tertullian recognizes, and does not hesitate to admit that, the subjective basis of his ethic is fear.<sup>113</sup> From his frequent references to 'the straits' or 'the extremity of the times' and to imminent<sup>114</sup> distresses, we might infer that his fear was due to an unprecedented threat or outbreak of persecution. Certainly, Tertullian wrote letters and treatises which presuppose the reality of persecution during his lifetime.<sup>115</sup> However, this was certainly no more onerous than it had been previously, and he can also reflect upon the security of his age,<sup>116</sup> not foreseeing the catastrophic irruption of social anarchy and persecution

111. v. P. Brown, op. cit., p.85.

112. v. Augustine, Confessiones, III, vi, 10, 11; vii, 12; IV, xv, 23-31, on his period of Manichaean materialism.

113. e.g. Ad. Ux. II, vii, De Cult. Fem. II, ii ; cf. De Pud. ix.

114. v. e.g. Ad Ux. I, iii, v ; De Cult. Fem. II, ix ; De Monog. vii.

115. De Fuga in Persecutione; Ad Martyres ; Ad Uxorem was written in view of the danger of his imminent death.

116. De Pallio, II, viii f..

which dates from A.D.235. It therefore seems unlikely that Tertullian was following the precedent of Matthew who, in his Gospel, calls the Christian community to 'a higher righteousness' as a means of stiffening its resistance to oppression.<sup>117</sup>

Throughout his ethical writings, Tertullian can be found deprecating the increasing moral depravity of his age.<sup>118</sup> Since there is little evidence to suggest that this was a period of sharp moral decline, his fear of the world might be taken to reflect a repressed delight in its attractions. However, his denunciations contain only what we should expect of a committed Christian living under the Empire, and reference to increasing moral decay was already traditional, though not therefore artificial. What is more significant, is that his strictures concerning moral laxity are often directed against the catholics, whom he calls 'Psychics'.<sup>119</sup> In particular they are taxed with refusing readmission to those who abjure their faith under duress, while allowing it to any who deny the faith in, and for the sake of, pleasure.<sup>120</sup> Although the specific charge is not wholly justified, it rests upon the indisputable fact that, as the church was becoming more popular so inevitably it was appearing more 'worldly'. Viewed in this light, all that Tertullian has to say about the Gentiles, referring to the challenge of their righteousness - 'when Satan affects God's sacraments',<sup>121</sup> - as well as to the threat of their

117. cf. e.g. Matthew 5: 20, 48 and 10: 16 ff.

118. e.g. De Cult. Fem. II, xii; cf. Ad. Ux. II, vii on Satan's special attempts to undermine the faithful.

119. e.g. De Monog. 1. The implication, of course, is that they are materialistic in the 'earthly' sense.

120. De Pud. xxii.

121. De Exhort. Cast. xiii.

immorality, assumes great importance. What he most feared was the threat to Christian identity which he discerned in the life of the church. His response was that of any good conservative to the threat of subversion. He reasserted the need for 'law and order' and at the same time increased the law's demands.<sup>122</sup> And in the sect of Montanus, he found a distinctive Christian community whose doctrines could justify the stern legalism he desired.

This legalism also largely explains Tertullian's great antipathy to the sexual life. We cannot satisfactorily account for this merely by pointing to the Christian tradition and the sexual character of much of the 'licence' in the later Empire. For Tertullian was aware that his environment revealed just as much 'worldly' as 'fleshly' concupiscence. Yet he conceived the latter to be the pre-eminent form of material opposition to the spiritual life and so played his part in determining that the (spiritual) principle of opposition to the Truth in Christendom should be sensuality rather than wealth, Don Juan rather than the exploiting capitalist.<sup>123</sup> We may be sure that this was largely due to the all-absorbing character of the unrestrained sexual drive which makes it appear more directly opposed to spiritual concern<sup>124</sup> and more immediately

122. In this year of grace(!) 1968, we could say that, lacking the power, of the 'Russian Bear', he fell back on the claws of the 'American Eagle'.

123. 'Spiritual' because it is an assertion evoked from man as a protest against the false exclusion of an element of life. v. S. Keikegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. I (transl. Swenson and Swenson) Anchor Books, N.Y., 1959, pp. 43 ff: *The Immediate Stages of The Erotic or The Musical Erotic*, esp. pp. 59-63. 'Christianity has brought sensuousness into the world' (p.59).

124. e.g. 1 Corinthians, 7: 25-35. It is amazing how many exegeses and others have fastened upon the reference to the world's imminent end in verse 26 in order to explain away, as far as may be possible, Paul's attitude. They fail to notice that verses 32 to 35 are not only capable of standing on their own, but that Paul implies as much when he says that he is seeking to secure 'good order' and 'undivided devotion' to the Lord' (v.35) Here is more than a matter of emergency measures!

productive of disorder or threat to the law.<sup>125</sup> Tertullian's concern for the latter is revealed by his statement that he aims only 'to regulate', not 'to do away with', marriage,<sup>126</sup> and his fear that marriage which has 'ceased to be once for all is open to any and every number'.<sup>127</sup>

Because of the crisis which it represents and endeavours to meet, Tertullian's ethic poses a challenge which later writers must either directly or implicitly take up. Were the traditional resources of the Christian community an inadequate basis for Christian identity? Must man's sexual nature be entirely over-ruled? Was there no place in the church for those weaker brethren who could not achieve or begin to approach perfect holiness? Could nothing but evil emerge from the world? Two hundred years were to elapse before one man would give a thorough reply to these and other questions raised by the life and work of Tertullian. In the meantime, however, the church was not bereft of scholars and, before we examine the contribution made by Augustine, we should see whether he was helped by the work of more immediate predecessors.

Cyprian belongs to the generation immediately following Tertullian and so lived to experience the social breakdown of the Empire during the third century, as well as the Decian and Valerian persecutions. His biographer tells us that even when his faith was rudimentary, Cyprian

125. We should stress the fact that both these differences are more apparent than real. Greed has available a greater variety of masks, such as creativity (for economic exploitation) and benevolence (for its display of economic power), than lust. Further, its capacity to produce 'goods' for consumption, enables even the most laissez-faire economic system to forestall the inevitable social dislocation a little longer than wantonness. On the surface, however, these are real differences and, consequently, those societies which restrict selfish sexuality rather than cupidity, are in the majority. Thus, when they do break down, it is more likely to be a result of failure at the level of economic rather than sexual morality. v. inf. pp. 66, 71 on the breakdown of the Roman Empire.

126. De Monog. xv.

127. Ibid. xi.



'believed that before God nothing was worthy in comparison of the observance of continency'.<sup>128</sup> The early maturity of his faith, we are told, fully justified his elevation within two years of his baptism to the episcopal see of Carthage.<sup>129</sup> Ten years later, in A.D.258, he joined the ranks of the martyrs.

Much of Cyprian's thought is directly dependent upon Tertullian. His appreciation of the value of discipline can only have been heightened by the trials through which he was called to shepherd his flock.

'Discipline, the safeguard of hope, the bond of faith, the guide of the way of salvation, the stimulus and nourishment of good dispositions, the teacher of virtue, teaches us to abide always in Christ, and to live continually for God, and to attain to the heavenly promises and to the divine rewards'.<sup>130</sup> Like Tertullian, then, Cyprian sets forth an ethic

of self-achievement but, unlike his predecessor, he makes grace the sine qua non of man's progress in virtue. 'Anything like boasting in one's own praise is hateful, although we cannot (in reality) boast, but only be grateful for whatever we do not ascribe to man's virtue but declare to be the gift of God . . . All our power is of God; I say, of God'.<sup>131</sup>

Included in God's gift then, is the presence of the Spirit with its capacity to quicken in man a life of virtue. However, Cyprian focuses attention on the ecclesiological, rather than the ethical, significance of this conception. Against the Montanists, who separated

128. Pontius, The Life And Passion of Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr, ii.

129. Ibid, iii - v.

130. De Habitu Virginum i.

131. Epistle I (to Donatus), iv.

an initial act of divine clemency, of which baptism was the sign, from a later descent of the Spirit upon the few who constitute the true church, Cyprian could affirm that baptism symbolized the presence of the Spirit as well as God's forgiveness<sup>132</sup> and so guaranteed membership of the true and catholic church.

Although the Spirit gives both 'liberty and power' to live faithfully, Cyprian does not allow his appreciation of its capacity to refresh the thirsting heart<sup>133</sup> to challenge his ethical presupposition. Thus, he upholds Tertullian's depiction of the effects of the Fall. Man is subject to death through 'being born after the flesh according to Adam' - punished 'not for his own sins, but the sins of another',<sup>134</sup> - and subject to sin 'through human error'.<sup>135</sup> The essential moral needs which grace supplies are, therefore, the removal of the external constraints of punishment and ignorance; in short, forgiveness and enlightenment. Thus, the dynamic quality of the Spirit has no formative influence on Cyprian's ethic. Man's intrinsic capacity for moral achievement is never questioned, and the power which the presence of the Spirit imparts is merely an ethical bonus.

The ethical limitations of Cyprian's concept of spiritual power are also apparent when he claims that God is pre-eminently the judge of the church<sup>136</sup> and that the faithful should 'let fear be the keeper of innocence, that the Lord . . . may be kept by righteous submissiveness in the hostelry of a grateful mind'.<sup>137</sup> Those who sin after baptism can

132. Ibid.

133. Ibid, v.

134. Ep. LVIII, v.

135. Ep. I, iv.

136. e.g. Ep. LI, xxix.

137. Ep. I, v.

no longer plead the excuse of ignorant weakness; they have wilfully preferred death to salvation. The idea that man might wittingly reject the Good would be incomprehensible to the classical mind and its introduction was destined to produce that sense of radical responsibility which distinguishes the Western psyche so markedly from the complacency of the Greek and Roman. For Cyprian it is most important because it explains the appearance of heresy and schism in the church.<sup>138</sup> These occur, he says, because 'a man left to his own liberty, and established in his own choice' will be as likely to follow evil as good ways.<sup>139</sup> The problem of Christian identity is not met, but posed by sectarianism and Cyprian's answer, following his reassertion of the Spirit's descent in baptism, is to require obedience to the catholic church. Referring to Deuteronomy 17: 12f., he says that salvation is not possible for those who 'have refused to obey the bishops and priests'.<sup>140</sup> So the church replaces Scripture and the Holy Spirit of the Montanists as the supreme source of the Christian's discipline.<sup>141</sup>

138. Cyprian's concern was primarily with the Novations, v. Ep. LI. Like the Montanists, they forbade second marriages; also they refused to readmit those who lapsed from the church. Cyprian was primarily concerned with the latter argument, whose importance reflects the rising tide of persecution during this period.

139. Ep. LIV, vii.

140. Ep. LXI, iv.

141. It is noteworthy that the early Cyprian upholds the 'rigorist' view: 'there is no further pardon for sinning after you have begun to know God' (De Hab. Virg. ii; cf. Ep. LI, ii: the reference to his early 'evangelical vigour'). His change in attitude to discipline (and perfectionism) is concurrent with his growing respect for episcopal authority. Consequently, his writings provide ammunition for both sides in the fourth and fifth-century battle between catholics and Donatists in Africa, each side being most anxious to claim the authority of the great African Father. Essentially, this was a battle concerning episcopal purity which is a measure of the change in attitude to the question of the locus of Christian identity in the intervening century, v. inf. pp. 82. For an excellent summary of the issues of the Donatist controversy, v. P. Brown, op. cit. pp. 212-225.

Secure in his institutional framework, Cyprian can allow mercy to operate within the sphere of discipline.<sup>142</sup> So 'to adulterers, even a time of repentance is granted by us, and peace is given'. This does not weaken the church as it makes its stand for 'chastity and modesty'. 'It is one thing to stand for pardon, another thing to attain to glory . . . It is one thing . . . to be in suspense till the sentence of God at the day of judgement, another to be at once crowned by the Lord'.<sup>143</sup> The church's mercy cannot be taken as the sign of divine forgiveness for, as Tertullian had already pointed out, that would undermine the demand for discipline. Such mercy is rather a submission to God's will that, according to the parable, the tares be allowed to grow up alongside the wheat<sup>144</sup> and so a means of preventing sinners from passing beyond the sphere of discipline altogether while yet maintaining order in the church. We shall let the reader decide for himself the extent to which this provision deserves to be called 'mercy'.

As the reference just made to the adulterer suggests, Cyprian shared Tertullian's estimate of the gravity of sexual sins. One of his basic reasons for doing so is also very similar - the desire to avoid disorder or, as he puts it, 'scandal' in the church<sup>145</sup>, behind which lies

142. That is, the later Cyprian v, sup. note 141.

143. Ep. LI, xx.

144. Ibid, xxv.

145. Ep. LXI, ii - concerning the practice of syneisaktism, or spiritual marriage. The virgin and her partner would cohabit and, in some cases, share the same bed. Cyprian thinks that if they cannot persevere in the proper manner, i.e., apart, 'it is better that they should marry'. Almost certainly he has 1 Corinthians 7; 36 in mind but, in view of vv. 37f., Paul's admission of the practice, he does not refer to the passage. Later, Jerome will explain this away by claiming that *παρθενομ* refers to one's own (virgin) body, i.e. by assimilating it to the advice of v. 9. The passage has, of course, remained an interpretative crux until the present, the question being, who is the subject of v. 36: the parent or the betrothed. The context of the whole chapter, in which parents are nowhere else referred to, and the practice of syneisaktism make the latter the more likely.

his fear of the church losing its identity. The other chief reason is his understanding of the Spirit which, if less apparently materialist than Tertullian's, is no less opposed to the necessities of bodily existence. For the Spirit exerts its influence through the 'empire of the mind', which it enables not just to withdraw 'from the mischievous associations of the world', but to grow 'greater and stronger in its might, so that it can rule over all the imperious host of the attacking adversary with its sway'.<sup>146</sup>

These words show that although his sense of the power of the spirit does not alter the basic character of Cyprian's ethic, it at least allows him to confront the hostile world with a confidence not found in Tertullian.<sup>147</sup> However, the chief effect of his conception of the Spirit is to determine the content of virtue. He tells us that 'the greater holiness and truth . . . belongs to (virgins), who have no longer any desires of the flesh and of the body'.<sup>148</sup> Elsewhere Cyprian recognises and affirms Scripture's proclamation of the equality of God's gifts.<sup>149</sup> But, like Tertullian, he cites Matthew 19: 11f. in support of the claim that virgins have a greater share in grace for

146. Ep. I, v.

147. cf. Tertullian, *De Fuga in Persecutione*. In a situation of fierce and systematic persecution flight, such as Tertullian envisages, becomes almost impossible.

148. *De Hab. Virg.*, xxiii.

149. Ep. LVIII, iii.

which they will receive special reward 'in the heavenly home'.<sup>150</sup> This introduces the same ambivalence into his conception of grace and virginity as we noted in Tertullian - the virgin possesses 'only the things which belong to virtue and the Spirit'.<sup>151</sup> Their superior holiness demands that virgins be recognised as 'the flower and portion of the ecclesiastical seed, . . . the more illustrious portion of Christ's flock'.<sup>152</sup> Virginity is more appropriate in the church than marriage since, unlike the latter, it directly reflects the will of God.<sup>153</sup>

Cyprian is able to affirm the pre-eminence of virginity less ambiguously than Tertullian because his confidence in the church as a sufficient guarantee of Christian identity renders any demand for universal perfection unnecessary. With clear Scriptural warrant he points out that virginity is not commanded, but left to 'the free choice of the will'.<sup>154</sup> We should not be surprised at his further claim, supported by a carefully selected Scriptural reference, that the Lord exhorts his followers to virginity.<sup>155</sup> In view of the insecurity of his situation, it is more surprising that his view of the Spirit did not lead him to intensify the traditional interpretation of sexual behaviour. His sense of security in the church, to which this testifies,

150. De Hab. Virg. iv; xxiii; cf. Tertullian. De Monog. iii. In other words, there is a refusal to read Matthew 19: 11f. in the light of the preceding verse. The former verses are treated as an independent logion, which they may originally have been. We shall discover that these verses maintained their independent status throughout the patristic and medieval periods.

According to Cyprian, the virgin also possesses a notable temporal reward: she is free from the curse of Genesis 3:16 upon child-bearing. v. De Hab. Virg. xxii.

151. De Hab. Virg. xxiii.

152. Ibid., iii.

153. cf. sup. p. 34.

154. De Hab. Virg. xxiii.

155. John 14:2 is interpreted on the basis of Luke 20:35f. v. De Hab. Virg. xxii f.

also allows a slight moderation of Tertullian's requirements for modesty. The married woman can feel free to make herself attractive to her husband, although she must beware that she is not seeking to do more.<sup>156</sup> However, most of Cyprian's arguments concerning modesty betray the influence of Tertullian and, while they are usually addressed to virgins, they would apply equally to all women.<sup>157</sup> Thus one of the sexes is excluded from his demand that Christians confront the world more positively. This may reflect a proper regard for woman's safety in time of danger, but it carries the implication that she lacks part of man's spiritual endowment and has no resistance whatsoever. Virgins especially must be protected since, without their form of chastity, the church loses its identity, and 'their weak sex and their age' make them peculiarly susceptible to the wiles of the devil.<sup>158</sup>

Cyprian's faith in the power of the spirit then, carries no hope that some good may come out of the world. Indeed, it seems likely that this element in his theology owes much to the troubles of the age since, persecution being widespread as well as fierce, a high premium was placed upon flight or separation from the world. Those who could not live in the desert would have to stand up and fight with their spiritual weapons. Despite its world-denying character, however, Cyprian's thought contains just a hint of the realism which recognises that the world is not wholly subject to ugly satanic forces. Since the supreme reality is spiritual,

156. De Hab. Virg. xvii.

157. Ibid, v. ff.

158. Ep. LXI, ii.



this world contains only 'the appearances of things', but, while his basic intention is to encourage Christians to reject them, he can begin his letter to Donatus with expressions of genuine delight in his garden setting.<sup>159</sup> This approach to reality 'from above', which reflects the classical mind,<sup>160</sup> will be more fully exploited in the theology of Augustine.

Cyprian's response to the problems raised by Tertullian was to reassert traditional attitudes on the basis of an increased authority of the church. Given the circumstances under which he lived and wrote, this was an understandable and probably wise thing to do. In spite of our criticism of some of these traditional attitudes, we may also say that Cyprian possibly took the right course for the future. However, we cannot say that he has proved his case. Whatever may be thought of his arguments, largely Scriptural, in support of the church's unity and authority<sup>161</sup> he ignores the more existential and ethical basis of the sectarian challenge. Indeed, since his own ethical outlook is not markedly different, he only exacerbates the problem.

More than one hundred years later Ambrose, the archetypal bishop of Milan, was still following the path laid down by Cyprian. That he was able to do so is a measure of the growing strength of the church,

159. Ep. I, vi and i.

160. v. esp. E. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, Princeton U.P., 1953, chs. 1-3 and note p. 89.

161. v., e.g. Ep. LI; *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*.

especially after A.D. 313 when Constantine gave it imperial recognition. Without this background of political support, the ecumenical councils of the period would have lacked much of their immediate effect and the authority of the catholic church, which they both imply and affirm could not have so easily become a presupposition of Christian thinking.<sup>162</sup> Temporarily at least, the fortuities of the church's new situation had postponed full treatment of the problem of Christian identity which, originally, had arisen largely because of the changed situation.

Ambrose had been trained for a legal and administrative career upon which he had already successfully embarked when, in A.D. 374, at the age of 34, and still unbaptized, the people of Milan called upon him to become their bishop. As a catechumen, he was not canonically qualified for the office, but despite this, and his own active opposition, the emperor ratified his election. So, after undergoing baptism, he was consecrated. The event not only indicates the statesmanlike qualities of the man, but testifies to the high status of the church in Milan and the strength and independent spirit of the Milanese. Their support would prove invaluable to a bishop who did not lack opportunities for employing his political expertise in the service of the church. However,

162. v., e.g., C.N. Cochrane, op. cit., ch. V, esp. pp. 209ff. Of course, as Cochrane points out, the work of the Councils bore implications for the limits of imperial authority as Constantine's successors were to discover. In other words, influence was not unilateral.

his contribution to the life of the church went far beyond this. During his lifetime, he was renowned for having introduced Eastern forms of hymnology into the liturgy, part of their novelty being to have 'all the brethren singing together.'<sup>163</sup> Although his reputation has since suffered from his proximity to Augustine, the influence which he had on the latter's intellectual development has guaranteed continuing interest in his writings. These, reflecting the active character and preoccupations of the bishop, deal frequently with ethical subjects and aim to convince rather than to impress the reader. Of course, this does not mean that they are incapable of doing the latter!

The form of Ambrose's ethics is much the same as that which Cyprian had adopted. The emphasis which Ambrose places on the healing<sup>164</sup> properties of grace may imply that sin has taken deeper root in man than Tertullian or Cyprian had thought, but, when Christ the Physician has performed his work, the baptized<sup>165</sup> have still to earn their salvation. In De Officiis Ministrorum, his major ethical work, Ambrose states that a man dedicates himself to God in order to 'win eternal life by the fruit of good works, and atone for (his) sins by showing mercy.'<sup>166</sup> So, although he is conscious of the need for divine protection against an accusing conscience,<sup>167</sup> Ambrose can describe the happy life or goal of virtue in terms of 'a peaceful conscience and a

163. v. Augustine, *Confessiones*, IX, vii, 15.

164. v. e.g., *De Viduis*, ix, 53; x, 60 ff.

165. v. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 106f. on the conception of baptism as 'spiritual 'death' to the world', requiring a 'heroic break' with it, which Ambrose shared with many, especially the more cultivated, Christians of late Antiquity. This view had a disastrous effect on people's willingness to undergo baptism.

166. *De Off.* I, xxx, 150.

167. *Ibid.*, I, ii, 6.

calm innocence.<sup>168</sup> Conscience, therefore, escapes the contradiction of existence and becomes 'a true and uncorrupted judge of punishments and rewards, (which) decides between the deserts of the innocent and the guilty'.<sup>169</sup> Just as man's quest for blessedness commences upon reception of the sacrament of the church, so it must continue under the protection of the 'mother',<sup>170</sup> of the faithful. A major factor in Ambrose's concern for priestly virtue, therefore, is his desire that the clergy be genuine, men to whom the rest of the faithful will readily entrust their 'safety' and 'reputation'.<sup>171</sup> A particular class within the church is assuming primary responsibility for the preservation of Christian identity.<sup>172</sup>

168. Ibid, II, i, 1.

169. Ibid, I, xii, 44. The original, classical significance of conscience 'as the bearer of ethical negation and futility in the relations between man and the order of things in which he lives' is thus being lost and the process has begun which will lead to Thomas Aquinas' conception of it as the internal ethical arbiter, cf. P. Lehmann, op. cit. pp. 328 ff.

170. v. e.g. De Virginibus, I, v. 22; vi, 31.

171. De Off., II, viii, 43.

172. C.N. Cochrane, op. cit., p. 374 rightly points out that 'the existence of a so-called 'double standard' of morality in Ambrosian ethics' rests upon a recognition of the part played by divine grace in determining the will of believers'. We have already noted this in drawing attention to the high estimate of virginity (v. sup. pp. 11-13, 35). However, Cochrane endeavours to gloss over the ambivalent character of this particular conception of grace by claiming that 'the double standard is not final, for, throughout, grace is depicted, not as a denial of nature, but as its fulfilment'. In theory, that is true (v. inf. pp. 42f. on the mutuality of grace and nature in Ambrose) but in practice, it is not, for this view of grace involves a conception of its specific or existential identity which divides the church into two classes. At best, grace fulfils some aspects of 'nature' more effectively than others. Thus, however much Ambrose may declare that his view of virginity 'implies no disparagement of marriage' (v. e.g. De Virginibus, I, vi, 24), Cochrane fails to see that mere refusal to condemn it 'as the heretics do', is insufficient to prove the point. Hence, Cochrane offers this extraordinary conclusion to his argument: 'Moreover, though on a less exalted plane than chastity, matrimony involves a discipline of its own: marry, he says, and weep'. (quoting De Virginitate, vi and Ep. (xiii, 107)) Since it is grace that places marriage on a lower plane, the latter is 'disparaged'; and since virginity is the glorious mark of the church, the acceptance of marriage, while it may not imply 'any disposition to compromise with secularism', produces exactly this effect, v. inf., pp. 6

Although Ambrose formulates his ethic according to the main lines of tradition, he elaborates it with the aid of categories of thought not hitherto influential in theological ethics. Inevitably, these cause some modification of the traditional context and character of the church's ethic. The influence of his Roman education, already suggested by the correlation of virtue with happiness and the role assigned to conscience, becomes apparent in the De Officiis. The structure and much of the content of this work are based upon Cicero's more famous treatise of the same name. From Cicero, Ambrose will have learned the Stoic conception of nature which supports an ethical ideal of rational self-control and establishes the broad outlines of man's duty. Man, Ambrose tells us, excels other living creatures in nothing 'more than in the fact that he has reason, seeks out the origin of things, thinks that the Author of his being should be searched out'.<sup>173</sup> If his possession of reason sets (or should set) man on the path to wisdom, it also requires him to check, though not to destroy, passion.<sup>174</sup> He should seek the 'tranquillity and calm' which reason diffuses<sup>175</sup> and 'keep the mean in all things',<sup>176</sup> for by so doing, he will 'live in accordance with nature'.<sup>177</sup>

173. De Off. I, xxvi, 124.

174. Ibid, I, xxi, 98; xxiv, 105ff; xlvii, 238 etc.

175. Ibid, I, xxii, 98.

176. Ibid, I, xx, 89.

177. Ibid, I, xlvi, 232.

Nature also establishes that man was made 'for the sake of man',<sup>178</sup> and consequently prescribes the virtues of justice and good-will which hold society together.<sup>179</sup> Hence even love has its basis in nature,<sup>180</sup> although Ambrose hastens to point out that grace provides a stronger ground for this virtue.<sup>181</sup>

His recourse to a classical scheme of virtue presents Ambrose with the problem of distinguishing the Christian from the pagan humanist. This he does by criticising Cicero's depiction of justice as chief among the virtues. Although the glory of justice is 'great',<sup>182</sup> man's first service is that of the mind to God. Wisdom, of which faith is a sign, must therefore be ranked ahead of justice.<sup>183</sup> As we shall shortly see, Ambrose had a very clear idea of the existential import of wisdom. However, in the context of the De Officiis he experiences great difficulty in establishing Christian identity. Even when he states that the basic element in justice is man's performance of his duty towards God, he is only following Cicero.<sup>184</sup> Hence he does not fail to seize upon the slightest pretext for criticising pagan ideals and examples of virtue. He only adopts the classical four-fold division of virtue 'in deference to commonly received ideas'.<sup>185</sup> It is really quite

178. Ibid, I, xxviii, 134.

179. Ibid, I, xxviii, 130.

180. Ibid, I, xxvii, 127.

181. Ibid, I, vii, 24.

182. Ibid, I, xxviii, 136.

183. Ibid, I, 1, 261 f.

184. Ibid, I, xxvii, 127.

185. Ibid, II, ix, 49.

artificial, and so is any ethical scheme which is based upon it. Instead he sets forth 'the example of the fathers of old',<sup>186</sup> incessantly claiming that 'the philosophers' have plagiarized or merely repeated the Old Testament teachings<sup>187</sup> and failed to produce examples of virtuous actions 'more glorious and ancient' than those of Scripture.<sup>188</sup> Paradoxically then, the influence of his Roman background and training helps to explain Ambrose's conviction that the methods of the philosophers could be replaced by a 'revealed Wisdom'.<sup>189</sup>

It would be wrong to suggest that Ambrose's method has no effect on his depiction of Christian duty. The Old Testament examples not only lend vivacity to the idea of virtue, but inform Ambrose's account of specific virtues. Justice, he states, includes giving help to those who are in need and dealing kindly with one's enemies.<sup>190</sup> When Abraham is described as someone with whom 'the reasonableness of performing his duty to God prevailed',<sup>191</sup> it is difficult to decide whether the Biblical understanding of faithfulness or the classical view of reason is stretched most. However, the classical view is clearly to the fore in his conception of friendship as the most beautiful and precious thing in the world, being shared alike by angels and by men'.<sup>192</sup> Friendship is a partnership

186. Ibid, I, xxv, 116.

187. e.g. Ibid, I, xxviii, 131ff; II, ii, 4ff.

188. Ibid, III, viii, 80.

189. P. Brown, op. cit., p.112.

190. Ibid, I, xxviii, 135; xxix, 139f.; cf. xxv, 118: 'The just man has pity, the just man lends'.

191. Ibid, I, xxiv, 108; cf. xxv, 118f.

192. Ibid, III, xxii, 131; 134.

in love based on a common mind and mutual esteem.<sup>193</sup> Therefore it is not possible 'between diverse characters' nor with someone 'who has been unfaithful to God'.<sup>194</sup> When we analyse Ambrose's treatment of friendship and justice, we begin to see why the De Officiis 'has been described as a curious blend of Stoic and Christian principles'.<sup>195</sup>

In the light of the problems it raises for the ethical identity of the church, Ambrose's ready acceptance of a classical ethical framework is quite remarkable. It testifies to the church's failure to discover a systematic principle of identity and to the close links between church and Empire in the fourth century which were largely responsible for that failure. Although it only exacerbates the problem of Christian identity, we might expect that the Stoic conception of nature and the rule of reason would lead Ambrose to evaluate the sexual impulse and marriage a little more highly than his predecessors. Instead, we discover that, like so many of aristocratic temperament, he was a fervent admirer of the ascetic, especially the virgin. In the De Virginibus, probably the first of his many treatises concerning virginity,<sup>196</sup> he records that he has been criticized for 'always singing the praises of virgins'.<sup>197</sup>

193. Ibid, III, xxii, 133.

194. Ibid, III, xxii, 132.

195. C.N. Cochrane, op. cit., p. 373.

196. He wrote at least four treatises dealing with various aspects of the subject, from what commends it, to the training and discipline necessary for it.

197. De Virginibus, II, xi, 57.



Although its Stoic background and more systematic ethical intention prevent any marked emphasis on sexuality, the De Officiis does suggest the basis of Ambrose's appreciation of virginity. His argument for clerical continence merely repeats the traditional claim that the priest 'must have a pure body wherewith to offer up the sacraments'.<sup>198</sup> However, his conception of the effect of grace reflects the neo-Platonic distinction between the realms of mind and matter<sup>199</sup> which was what first impressed Augustine, struggling with materialism, in Ambrose's sermons.<sup>200</sup> In baptism, Ambrose writes, 'the outer man is destroyed, but the inner is renewed'. Repentance also, by the 'destruction of the flesh, tends to the growth of the spirit'.<sup>201</sup> Again we notice the ambivalent conception of grace as the provision of something which man can also earn and again this leads to an ambivalent understanding of virginity. As well as being 'incited by an increase of grace',<sup>202</sup> the virgin seeks 'her manner of life from heaven'.<sup>203</sup> Further evidence of the neo-Platonic background to his thought is provided by the ecstatic language Ambrose employs in his descriptions of the virgin's state. 'She, passing beyond the clouds, air, angels, and stars, has found the Word of God in the very bosom of

198. *De Off.* I, 1, 258.

199. cf. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 90ff. on the influence of Platonic ideas amongst the Milanese aristocracy.

200. i.e. in their content; first of all it had been Ambrose's eloquence which impressed the teacher of rhetoric v. *Confessiones*, V, xiii f.

201. *De Off.* III, xviii, 108.

202. *De Vid.* xi, 71: a general discussion of 'marriage' and 'chastity' (sic!); cf. xii, 72.

203. *De Virginibus*, I, iii, 11.

the Father, and has drawn Him into herself with her whole heart'.<sup>204</sup> The image of the soul's ravishing return to the divine source of being lies behind other, more superficially Christian images which Ambrose applies to the virgin. She is compared to the church who, like 'the soul in individuals, . . . weds the word of God as her eternal Spouse',<sup>205</sup> and, drawing upon the Song of Solomon, to the bee which 'feeds upon dew', her dew being 'the divine word'.<sup>206</sup>

Despite the greater security of the fourth-century Christian, Ambrose upholds the traditional view that the virgin, in order to protect her exalted state, should withdraw from the world. He claims that the mother of the Lord, the model of virginity, only left her home in order to attend divine service.<sup>207</sup> However, his arguments reflect the more settled environment and neo-Platonic basis of his thought by concentrating on the dangers of passion rather than of the world. Certainly the world is full of temptations<sup>208</sup> but 'the unsubdued appetites' of 'tender age' constitute the chief danger to virginal chastity.<sup>209</sup> Therefore, when the body has been subdued by 'reason', 'hope', and 'fear', Ambrose is prepared to allow that discipline be softened.<sup>210</sup> This neo-Platonic opposition to the flesh gives rise to a

204. Ibid.; v, P. Brown, op.cit. pp. 95-98 for a brief summary of 'the Neo-Platonic doctrine of 'procession' outwards, and its corollary, a 'turning' inwards'.

205. De Virginibus, I, vi, 31.

206. Ibid, I, viii, 40ff. referring to Canticles 5: 1f.. The Song of Songs proved a fertile source for the 'Christian mystic and ascetic', v. inf. p. 58 on Jerome's justification of its use.

207. De Virginibus, II, ii, 9.

208. e.g. Ibid, III, iii, 9; v, 25ff.

209. Ibid, III, ii, 5.

210. Ibid, III, iv, 16.

conception of modesty and of shame which attaches them primarily to sexuality and increases the traditional emphasis on their world-denying character. Modesty is described as 'the companion of purity, in conjunction with which chastity itself is safe',<sup>211</sup> and is said to be 'worn away by intercourse'.<sup>212</sup> Shame appears as the basic form of modesty, 'a companion and guide of chastity, inasmuch as it does not suffer purity to be defiled in approaching even the outskirts of danger'.<sup>213</sup> In the light of the high premium which Ambrose places upon the preservation of chastity, we are scarcely surprised when he equates suicide for this purpose with martyrdom.<sup>214</sup>

Ambrose recognizes that virginity transcends nature's laws<sup>215</sup> but his attitude to the flesh prevents him from treating man's 'natural' sexuality with much sympathy. His most favourable remarks about marriage are founded on the Stoic conception of mankind's 'natural' solidarity. Hence 'he who condemns marriage, condemns the birth of children, and condemns the fellowship of the human race, continued by a series of successive generations'.<sup>216</sup> Ambrose can also refer to marriage as a 'gift' which would appear to break the exclusive association of grace with virginity. However, his claim that the

211. De Off. I, xviii, 69.

212. De Virginibus, III, iii, 9.

213. De Off. I, xviii, 69.

214. De Virginibus, III, vii, 32ff.. In Ibid, II, v, 35 he describes such a woman as 'superior to her sex'. cf. inf., p.50ff. on the 'asexuality' of Ambrose's ethic.

215. De Virginibus, I, iii, 11.

216. Ibid, I, vii, 34; cf. De Off. I, xxviii, 134.

gift is necessary to induce desire for offspring betrays his negative attitude to sexual desire as a factor leading to marriage.<sup>217</sup> Viewed from this perspective, marriage no longer appears as a chaste state<sup>218</sup> but as a 'remedy for weakness' which is unfavourably contrasted with 'the glory of chastity' in virginity.<sup>219</sup>

Virginity, therefore, justifies the effort which its maintenance requires, whereas marriage can scarcely do so. Since the former needs 'some mode of coming into existence',<sup>220</sup> and since the latter is the appointed means, parents may at least 'possess those by whose merits (their) faults may be redeemed'.<sup>221</sup> Otherwise their blessings are few. Marriage is a bond between two, and although 'the grace of mutual love' is beautiful, 'the bondage is more constant'. The 'constraint' in marriage is mutual -- it 'subjects even the stronger to the other' -- but is especially onerous for wives 'to whom, before slaves, God gave the command to serve'. 'If, then, Ambrose asks, 'a good marriage is servitude, what is a bad one, when they cannot sanctify, but destroy one another'?<sup>222</sup> This argument, claiming the support of various Scriptural texts, is reinforced by a meticulous account of the problems arising from marriage. These range from the pain of childbirth, 'the troubles of

217. De Virginibus, I, vii, 34.

218. As it is implied to be in De Vid. xiii, 75.

219. De Virginibus, I, vi, 24,; De Vid. xiii, 79.

220. De Virginibus, I, vii, 35.

221. Ibid, I, vii, 32. Note the innuendo.

222. De Vid. xi, 69., De Virginibus, I, vi, 27.

nursing, training and marrying' children, and the expense of the dowry necessary 'to buy a son-in-law', to the incentives to vice, which are involved in the wives' attempts to please their husbands.<sup>223</sup> In the case of remarriage, the problems merely increase. If there are children of the former marriage, disagreements are bound to occur, if not, 'is it wise to wish to have a second trial of that fruitfulness which has already been tried in vain, or to submit to the solitude which you have already borne?'<sup>224</sup> Like Tertullian, Ambrose cites Scriptural arguments in favour of absolute monogamy, many of which are allegorical,<sup>225</sup> but, despite the similarity of their attitudes, he bows to the authority of church<sup>226</sup> and Scripture<sup>227</sup> which permit both marriage and remarriage. After all, Cicero had stated that duties were either ordinary or perfect and this, according to Ambrose, is the significance of the parable concerning the rich young man.<sup>228</sup>

In spite of his derogatory views on marriage, Ambrose can display a kind of aristocratic chivalry in his attitude towards the female sex. Thus he excused the credibility which Eve displayed when confronted by the serpent on the ground of the good-will which God bestowed upon her

223. De Virginibus, I, vi, 25; 26, vii, 33; vi, 28.

224. De Vid. xv, 88; 86.

225. Ibid, xv, 89. On allegorical exegesis, v. inf. p. 58.

226. e.g. De Vid. xi, 70.

227. e.g. Ibid, xii, 72ff.

228. De Off. I, xi, 36f; cf., De Vid. xii, 73.

and Adam.<sup>229</sup> However, he says nothing which would challenge classical man's unequal estimate of the sexes. 'Temperance', he states, 'is the virtue of woman',<sup>230</sup> and modesty 'is a matter of greater concern' than death 'to good women'.<sup>231</sup> By their withdrawal from society and its trappings, such as wine, women may remain 'pure from adultery'.<sup>232</sup> What concerns Ambrose, then, is the value of chastity, not of femininity. Hence widows, for example, cannot make insecurity or loneliness an 'excuse' for remarrying. They should emulate such Old Testament figures as Judith, or Deborah who 'not at all restrained by the weakness of her sex, undertook to perform the duties of a man'. From these examples Ambrose concludes that 'it is not sex but valour which makes strong'.<sup>233</sup> Nevertheless, the conviction that women are inferior beings who must be excluded from the society of men, is evident throughout his supposedly asexual ethic.<sup>234</sup> The Ambrosian concept of friendship is as classical in its masculinity as in its 'philosophical' definition. Thus, although he admits the possibility of love in marriage, not even this relationship offers woman the full complacency of friendship. God commanded wives to serve their husbands so 'that they may comply more

229. De Off. I, xxxii, 169.

230. De Vid. vii, 40.

231. De Off. III, xiii, 82.

232. De Vid. vii, 40.

233. v. De Vid. vii, 37 - ix, 58.

234. The 'masculine' character of the Ambrosian ethic is also apparent in his opposition to effeminacy and pursuits which 'enervate manly gravity' (v. De Off. I, xix, 84; xx, 85). This fear of bridging the sexual gap forms the basis of consistent opposition to actors and the theatre, which, though little evident in Ambrose (cf. De Off. I, xviii, 73), is stressed by Cyprian (v. Ep. LX, 7). The antagonism continued throughout the Middle Ages.

willingly, whose reward, if approved, is love; if not approved, punishment for the fault'.<sup>235</sup> Unity of the flesh implied unity of the spirit for Adam and Eve<sup>236</sup> but, since the Fall, it implies bondage rather than love.<sup>237</sup> The 'help' which woman now gives to man is to 'bear him children, that one man might always be a help to another'.<sup>238</sup>

In one important respect, Ambrose goes beyond and reinforces the classical degradation of woman. For his argument in favour of female chastity and withdrawal from society rests ultimately upon his understanding of grace. The proper response to the Incarnation is 'the service of an unstained body'<sup>239</sup> and this, more than anything else, Ambrose makes the mark of Christian identity. He thus associates himself with the growing tide of asceticism which, however, was not yet as firmly established in the West as in the East. In the *De Officiis*, for example, he has to face the claim that the custom of many churches upsets the view that the priestly office demands continence.<sup>240</sup> This helps to explain why Ambrose was willing to 'spoil the Egyptians', that is, to appropriate classical forms of thought as a means of justifying his position.<sup>241</sup> The man of action conceives the threat to identity in terms of the specifics of behaviour rather than

235. *De Virginibus*, I, vi, 27.

236. *De Off.* I, xxxii, 169.

237. *De Vid.* xi, 69; xv, 88.

238. *De Off.* I, xxviii, 134.

239. *De Virginibus*, I, iii, 13.

240. *De Off.* I, 1, 258; cf. inf. p. 56 on Jerome's appeal to the witness of the churches in support of virginity.

241. The account of the Israelites' spoliation of the Egyptian treasures (*Exodus* 12:33ff.) was frequently interpreted as an allegorical justification of the use of pagan thought. As far as I have been able to discover, Ambrose did not actually employ it. cf. *Augustine Confessiones*, VII, ix, 15.

the principles which lie behind it.

Most of the fuel for the growing fire of ascetical enthusiasm was provided from the East. It is there that we find, during the later years of his life, Jerome, a contemporary of Ambrose and, like him, a man with a background of thorough classical training. A scholar rather than a statesman, Jerome's lasting fame derives from his translation of the Bible into Latin. This work formed the basis of the Vulgate, the official Bible of the Catholic church, which is only now in process of revision. However, if he has acquired fame through his scholarship, Jerome has also achieved notoriety, in Protestant circles at least, through his heated antipathy towards sex. The atmosphere in which he wrote is best evoked in one of his letters where he describes himself as 'shut up in a monastic cell where, far removed from the world's turmoil, I lament the sins of the past and try to avoid the temptations of the present'.<sup>242</sup>

As this confession suggests, the ascetic model of virtue forms the settled presupposition of his life and thought. 'I'm starting on a new path', he tells one addressee, 'I'm not extolling virginity but preserving it'.<sup>243</sup> He prefers to spend his time encouraging others to conform to the model rather than seeking by systematic argument to justify it. There is more of the moral zealot than of the theological

242. Ep. 117, i.

243. Ep. 22, xxiii.



moralist in Jerome and this, together with the occasional character of much of his writings, prevents his ideas being entirely self-consistent.<sup>244</sup> Nevertheless, the general character of his thought and the ethical system which he presupposes, are quite clear.

Behind Jerome's ascetic ideal lies the traditional picture of the Christian life as the pursuit of virtue. 'The Christian life is the true Jacob's ladder on which the angels ascend and descend, while the Lord stands above it holding out His hand to those who slip and sustaining, by the vision of Himself, the weary steps of those who ascend'.<sup>245</sup>

An appreciation of the burdensome character of this life is here matched by an increased emphasis on divine mercy. However, since mercy is a function of justice and not a normative principle, part of its effect is to allow Jerome greater freedom to press the divine claim upon the Christian. The latter is called upon to 'seek to achieve . . . the perfect life', which involves making oneself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>246</sup> The achievement of such perfection guarantees a higher reward in heaven<sup>247</sup> and depends, as usual, upon a combination of 'human effort'<sup>248</sup> and grace, since the

244. For this reason, it is misleading to suggest that Jerome is best known, either in terms of his letters, where his humane character is certainly more in evidence (v. e.g., T.C. Laylor (ed.) in 'The Letters of Jerome' (trans. Microw), Longmans Green & Co., 1963, p.3), or in terms of his treatises, where his ascetical rigour is more consistently in the foreground (v., e.g., D.S. Bailey's facile dismissal of Epistles 48 and 49 in op.cit., p.28 and cf. inf. pp.63ff). The 'real' Jerome may only be found in and behind his contradictions.

245. Ep. 54, vi.

246. Ep. 14, iv.

247. e.g., *Adversus Jovinianus*, I, viii; xii.

248. *Ibid*, I, viii.

preservation of virginity 'surpasses the unassisted power of man.'<sup>249</sup>

Jerome paints a highly variegated picture of the content of perfection for, with an eclecticism quite typical of the moralist, he employs widely differing shades of thought. He shares, with Ambrose, the conviction that passion is opposed to reason<sup>250</sup> and the 'outer man' to the spirit.<sup>251</sup> His statements also reflect the influence of the more simple ideals of the Desert Fathers who were both geographically and spiritually part of his environmental background. Thus, the Christian is required 'to imitate' the life of his Lord,<sup>252</sup> which primarily means imitating 'the purity of the body of Christ,'<sup>253</sup> and he must flee from the devil who seeks continually to 'inflame' men's passion<sup>254</sup> and to immerse them in the affairs of the world<sup>255</sup> in order to lead them to hell.<sup>256</sup>

The influence of this simplistic account of responsibility, which overlooks the fact that the crusader's greatest temptation is to withdraw his zeal and leave the world to its own devices, may also be seen in two other features of Jerome's presentation of the ascetic

249. *Adversus Helvidius*, ('The Perpetual Virginity Of Blessed Mary'), xxiii.

250. *Ep.* 123, xiv.

251. *Adv. Jovin*, I, vii ; *Ep.* 54, x.

252. *Adv. Jovin*, I, viii.

253. *Ibid*, I, xx. When we remember the deep influence of the idea of the body in Hellenistic and early Christian thought (v. esp. E. Schweizer, *The Church as the Body of Christ*, S.P.C.K., 1965) we begin to appreciate the powerful effect of this interpretation of 'the place in which God will be glorified' (Schweizer, p. 40).

254. e.g., *Ep.* 123, ii ; *Ep.* 22, xi ; *Ep.* 130, x.

255. e.g., *Ep.* 130, vii.

256. e.g., *Ep.* 22, vii.

ideal. In the first place, it explains why, unlike Ambrose, Jerome was able to appeal to the common testimony of the churches in support of virginity.<sup>257</sup> In the East, virginity had virtually become the identifying mark of the church. Jerome's answer to the obvious charge that the Christian church hardly possesses exclusive rights to virginity also reflects this more settled state of affairs. Whereas Ambrose had, quite falsely, claimed that Christians were the first and only group to uphold life-long virginity,<sup>258</sup> Jerome simply states that only the Christian virgin practices those charitable good works without which even faith is dead.<sup>259</sup> Of course, this answer tacitly renounces the view that virginity is the distinctive virtue of the church and so implicitly raises the question whether the specifics of behaviour can ever provide terms by which the identity of a group may be established. Had they conceived the power of the Gospel in terms of grace rather than virtue, and faith in terms of the dynamics of life instead of intellectual content, the scholars of the patristic church might have discerned the full significance of the fact, which they recognised, that Satan can don the mask of virtue.<sup>260</sup> However, since, for them, virginity was 'of the church', it was also 'for the church'. Hence Jerome describes it as a perfect offering wherewith the church may 'reconcile the spotless Lamb'.<sup>261</sup> Without this, the church

257. e.g., Ep. 130, vii; xix.

258. Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, I, iv, 14ff.

259. *Adv. Jovin*, I, xi; xl; Ep. 123, viii.

260. v. esp., Tertullian, *De Exhort. Cast.* xiii; Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, I, iv, 14ff., Jerome, Ep. 123, viii.

261. *Adv. Jovin*, I, xl.

would lack sufficient merit to participate in the heavenly reward which is peculiarly appropriate to the virgin.<sup>262</sup>

All the writers whom we have studied so far display great energy and ingenuity in attempts to justify their positions from Scripture. In this respect Jerome is significant, not because his methods are very novel, but because his Scriptural scholarship established him as a pioneer of catholic exegesis and he claims to base his position on Biblical authority. 'I have several times written letters to widows in which, for their instruction, I have sought out examples from scripture, weaving its varied flowers into a single garland of chastity'.<sup>263</sup>

Biblical support for the ascetic view is therefore the presupposition and not a conclusion of Jerome's exegesis and we may differentiate three species of 'flower' which Jerome manages to discover in his garden. First, there is the simple prescript for behaviour, such as the requirement in the Pastoral epistles that a bishop be monogamous throughout his life. Like Tertullian, Jerome thought that this implied that laymen, from whom bishops are chosen, should be monogamous.<sup>264</sup> However, his respect for the authority of Scripture, reinforced by catholic practice, prevented him from seeking to extend the Christian 'law'. Furthermore,

262. Adv. Jovin, I, xii; xxxvi, xxxix.

263. Ep. 123, i. The image of Scripture as a field or garden seems to have greatly appealed to Jerome. He employs it again during the course of his terse correspondence with Augustine. v. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 274 f.

264. Ep. 123, vi.

the influence of the eremites led him to discern ideals rather than laws in Scripture. Such, for example, were the injunctions to 'pray without ceasing',<sup>265</sup> and to remain unmarried.<sup>266</sup>

Scripture's most beautiful flower, however, escapes immediate perception since great beauty, like a pearl, may not be cast before swine. This is the flower of spiritual truth which is veiled by earthy words in the same way as the 'inner man' is concealed behind the flesh. Allegorical interpretation furnishes the means whereby the Christian may uncover the spiritual flower and, from what we have seen of the ethical implications of this contrast between spirit and flesh, it should be clear that this exegetical method is far from being ethically neutral. Behind its 'fleshly words', then, the Song of Solomon 'is a marriage song of a spiritual bridal'.<sup>267</sup> The elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son 'is he who married a wife and cannot go to the wedding feast: being made flesh he can by no means be one with the spirit'.<sup>268</sup> In the light of the common view that man must merit the heavenly rewards, it is not surprising that continuing interest was shown in the parable of the sower. What was the significance of the different sizes of yield? Jerome, like Ambrose, refers the highest to virgins, the next to widows, and the lowest to the married.<sup>269</sup> He is pleased to point out to his critics

265. e.g. Ep. 22, xxii (referring to 1 Thessalonians 5: 17)

266. Ep. 130, x (referring to 1 Corinthians 7: 25)

267. Ep. 107, xii. From his demand that it be the last of the Biblical books set before the virgin, however, we may infer that Jerome's interpretation of the Song of Songs was less dogmatic than some of his successors, including those of more recent times.

268. Ep. 21., xxviii. This interpretation involves a cross-reference to Luke, 14:20 and so reflects the continuing belief in the Bible's homogeneity. v. sup. p. 5.

269. Ep. 123, xi. ; cf. Ambrose, De Vid. iv, 23; De Virginibus, I, xi, 60.

that Cyprian and Origen had allotted the hundred-fold yield to martyrs and so excluded married persons 'from the good ground and from the seed of the great Father'.<sup>270</sup> In fact, however, the more secure environment of the church is a sufficient explanation of this altered interpretation and Jerome's statements concerning sex and marriage are more liable to criticism than any we have yet encountered.

When it suits him, Jerome can refer to the goodness of God's creation and include desire therein.<sup>271</sup> However, he also points out that God is asexual;<sup>272</sup> that rebirth in Christ abolishes sexual differentiation;<sup>273</sup> that the creation of man and woman cannot be good

270. Ep. 48, iii. D.S. Bailey, op. cit. p. 98, note 1, claims that marriage had always been allotted the 30-fold fruit and that widowhood only entered into the scheme in the post-Nicene literature. Certainly, Cyprian does not make clear which class is the subject of the lowest yield (*De Hab. Virg.*) and Jerome may have been 'using' his silence for his own purpose of rebutting criticism of his treatise against Jovinian. However, although Bailey's conjecture is supported by the growing role assigned to widows in the patristic church, the early church having treated them as 'simply an object of ministry' (v. Bailey, op. cit. pp. 65ff., and cf. sup. p. 21 on Tertullian's account of widowhood), Jerome's claim is supported by the fact that the interpretation of the parable refers primarily to the degrees of chastity. Cyprian's predecessor, Tertullian, had already set virginity and widowhood above marriage in this respect and there is little doubt that most catholics would have agreed with him, for this estimate is not confined to his Montanist writings.

271. Ep. 54, ix.

272. Ep. 18B, i.

273. Adv. Jovin, I, xvi.

because, like the second day of creation which God did not look upon as 'good', it involves a duality which 'destroys unity';<sup>274</sup> and that desire, 'if it once oversteps its own bounds', becomes an 'innate' tendency to sin.<sup>275</sup> Hence we are not surprised to read that man 'is led astray by a natural tendency to evil',<sup>276</sup> or that the Christian should 'know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the lust of concupiscence, as the Gentiles who know not God.'<sup>277</sup> In this account of the 'natural' factors in the human situation we can discern the confusion, if not the contradiction, which often characterizes a moralistic appraisal of the world.

For the most part, the negative appraisal of sexual desire predominates in Jerome's account of marriage (and remarriage). Marriage is invariably the product of sexual passion. 'At least, if passion is not your motive, it is more madness to play the harlot just to increase wealth. You do but purchase a paltry and passing gain at the price of a grace which is precious and eternal.'<sup>278</sup> Furthermore, marriage only occurred after man was expelled 'from the paradise of virginity.'<sup>279</sup> However, like the sexual desire which is usually its source, marriage is justified by 'the procreation of children'<sup>280</sup> and it is, of course, necessary to produce virgins.<sup>281</sup> On the basis of 1 Timothy 2:15, where

274. Ibid. His reading of Genesis is patently selective, ignoring the references to the goodness of all creation, including the creation of woman (Genesis 1:31, 2:18).

275. Ep. 54, ix.

276. Ep. 22, xxiv, cf. Ep. 54, ix : all other sins are external to man, concupiscence alone infecting his being. The reference is, of course, to 1 Corinthians 6:18.

277. Adv. Jovin, I, xvi.

278. Ep. 54, xv.

279. Ep. 128, iii ; cf. Ep. 22, xix, where the same consideration leads him to conclude that 'virginity is natural'. Jerome obviously lacked a clear and precise conception of the 'natural'.

280. Adv. Jovin, I, xx ; cf. Ep. 54, ix.

281. e.g. Ep. 48, vii ; Ep. 22, xx.

he translates *σωφροσύνης* by castitas, Jerome claims that the woman will 'be saved if she bears children who will remain virgins'.<sup>282</sup> As for husbands, he approves those who love their wives 'with judgment, not with passion', as though they were adulteresses.<sup>283</sup> Nevertheless, chastity in marriage is often presented as abstinence from sexual intercourse<sup>284</sup> and, in his more heated moments, Jerome claims that it must be bad to touch a woman, if, as the Apostle states, it is good not to do so,<sup>285</sup> and that marriage is therefore merely a 'smaller evil' than wantonness,<sup>286</sup> and remarriage, the prostitution to one man instead of many.<sup>287</sup> Jerome does see more in marriage than the satisfaction of lust or cupidity. It brings 'not so much good to be hoped for as evil which may happen and must be feared'.<sup>288</sup> and he offers an even more exhaustive and vitriolic list of its difficulties<sup>289</sup> than Ambrose who, as he notes, had described it as 'a hard burden'.<sup>290</sup> No wonder he feared that his critics would accuse him of flattery when he began to praise the family life of one of his addressees.<sup>291</sup>

Most of Jerome's arguments against remarriage suggest a direct

282. Adv. Jovin, I, xxvii.

283. Ibid, I, xlix.

284. e.g. Adv. Jovin, I, xii ; Adv. Helvid. xxiii; Ep. 123, xi.

285. Adv. Jovin, I, vii.

286. Adv. Jovin, I, ix; vii; cf. Ep. 22, xxix; Ep. 79, x.

287. Adv. Jovin, I, xiv; Ep. 79, x ; Ep. 123, iv.

288. Ep. 123, xiv.

289. v., e.g., Ep. 22, ii ; Adv. Jovin, I, xlvii - xlix.

290. Ep. 48, xiv (quoting De Vid. xiii, 81; better translated: 'a galling burden', which captures more of the emotional fire of the mystic).

291. Ep. 79, i.



acquaintance with the writings of Tertullian on this subject.<sup>292</sup>

His description of the remarried as 'depraved women',<sup>293</sup> suffices to show that, despite his rejection of Tertullian's absolute prohibition of remarriage, his attitude differed little from that of his predecessor. As in his treatment of virginity, Jerome stresses that continence without works is useless. Without these, Christian widows cannot be distinguished from those of Juno.<sup>294</sup> Like Ambrose, Jerome admits that widowhood may impose greater burdens than perpetual virginity<sup>295</sup> but still refuses to revise his estimate of their relative merit or of the propriety of remarrying.

Jerome again echoes Ambrose when he makes chastity the special virtue of woman.<sup>296</sup> Modesty, therefore, also applies especially to her. To one widow he writes, 'Let paleness and squalor be henceforth your jewels'.<sup>297</sup> Here we may discern the influence of that extraordinary figure, the desert monk, who first came into being largely as a protest against the increasing 'worldliness' of the church<sup>298</sup> which had troubled Tertullian so deeply. Jerome appreciated the point of this protest. Whereas the temples of Roman idols once fell 'before the standard of the

292. v. esp. Ep. 123.

293. Adv. Jovin, I, xlix.

294. Adv. Jovin, I, xi.

295. Ep. 123, xi.

296. Adv. Jovin, I, xlix.

297. Ep. 79, vii.

298. v. inf. pp. 174f., 192f..

Cross and the severity of the Gospel: now on the contrary, lust and gluttony endeavour to overthrow the solid structure of the Cross'.<sup>299</sup> Hence he deems it unsafe for the virgin to attend crowded churches<sup>300</sup> and advises the mother of another, 'Let her be brought up in a monastery . . . let her be ignorant of the world'.<sup>301</sup>

Many of Jerome's extreme statements about marriage occur in his treatise against the views of Jovinian who, it appears,<sup>302</sup> had maintained that the different states of virginity, widowhood, and wedlock did not represent eternal distinctions in value. In the course of this treatise, Jerome faces the charge, frequently levelled against the ascetic, that he rejects part of the created order which exists for man's good.<sup>303</sup> The competent, sober manner in which Jerome handles this argument suggests that here, at least, he is not greatly distorting the views of his opponent who must, therefore, have implicitly criticized the state of virginity and not merely maintained that marriage is of equal value in the sight of God. Jerome's answer employs the legitimate method of reduction ad absurdum. The argument from creation is false because it implies that sexual desire should be acted upon merely because it is felt. This reply properly recognizes that every person is

299. Adv. Jovin, II, xxxvii.

300. e.g. Ep. 128, iii a.

301. Ep. 107, xiii.

302. His works have not survived; hence his position has to be inferred from Jerome's counter-arguments. Owing to the latter's heated antipathy to Jovinian, this task is by no means easy.

303. Adv. Jovin, I, xxxvi.

confronted with a super-abundance of objects and spheres of activity from which, if he is to pursue an integrated and purposeful existence, he must choose. However, because of his ascetic zeal, Jerome failed to see that the multiplicity of choices offered in historical existence makes any attempt to rigidly define which of these are proper extremely dubious. If the fact that sexual desire exists is insufficient justification for its use, the fact that it may lead to procreation hardly establishes this as the only purpose to which it may be legitimately put.

Jerome's reasoning, however, at least carries the argument forward and so belies the criticism that he merely silenced such critics 'with a spate of intemperate invective and puerile arguments interspersed with vulgar sarcasms and slanderous personalities'.<sup>304</sup> Jerome was a hot-headed zealot; but he was also one of the most outstanding scholars of the patristic church. In one of his letters to widows he offers a sensible reply to another charge frequently levelled at the ascetic ideal: that it implies an abnormal personality. 'It is better', he says, '. . . to rule the body than to serve it, to lose one's balance than to lose one's chastity'.<sup>305</sup> Few historical figures have better anticipated the criticisms of psychologizing historians (or playwrights) in this post-Freudian age. Jerome not only demonstrates that he is fully aware and in control of himself, but implies that notions such as 'normality' or

304. D.S. Bailey, op. cit., p. 28.

305. Ep. 79, x.

'the well-balanced person' themselves involve particular values which man is (or should be) free to appraise critically and accept or reject.

The treatise against Jovinian, because it was the most protracted and public statement of views which he had, in fact, expressed elsewhere, brought forth criticism from Jerome's supporters as well as his opponents. The effect which criticism by those whom he regarded as orthodox had upon him may be judged from his obsequious and somewhat disingenuous letter of retraction. Referring to his use of Paul's statement that it is good not to touch a woman he says, 'I timidly ask if it is good for a man not to touch one'.<sup>306</sup> In other words, he claims to have been merely setting forth 'what the Scriptures inculcate',<sup>307</sup> and he concludes by appealing to the modesty and frankness of a confession which praises in others what one lacks in oneself<sup>308</sup> and by pointing out that Christians are offered a choice in the matter.<sup>309</sup> There is a note of genuine tragedy in this letter; Jerome is anxious about his reputation for orthodoxy only because catholic values had always been the presupposition of his thought and he therefore rightly feels that he has been misunderstood. His reference to Scriptural authority implies as much.

His contemporaries, of course, feared that his criticisms of the marital state might lead to a new conception of the 'true' church.

306. Ep. 48, xiv; cf. sup. p. 61.

307. Ep. 48, xv.

308. Ibid, xx.

309. Ibid, xxi.

Mere affirmation of Scriptural and ecclesiastical permission of marriage would be insufficient to allay this fear. Jerome was bringing the desert protest too close to home. However, they failed to appreciate the form and intention of Jerome's statements. They are not the promulgation of a universal law for Christian behaviour, but the portrayal of an ideal, and they do not pretend that the ideal is universally attainable. In an age becoming increasingly convinced that the noble social ideals of the Empire were moribund,<sup>310</sup> the ascetic ideal offered the few a lofty affection<sup>311</sup> and new vigour of soul.<sup>312</sup> 'The love of Christ'<sup>313</sup> thus provided a new sense of personal dignity, as well as a psychological mainspring whereby the individual could endure the 'hard discipline' necessary to escape from the world of limited affections and loyalties to which the masses were confined.<sup>314</sup>

Jerome appreciated more keenly than Ambrose the intense individualism and radical renunciation of social responsibility inherent in such love. This was veiled from the bishop by his use of Stoic and neo-Platonic ideas which supported an ideal of 'spiritual' friendship and by his style of life as an eminent figure in the sophisticated life

310. Ep. 123, written in A.D. 409 with the collapse of Rome imminent, reflects this by its reference to men vying 'with one another in proving the chastity of our beloved widow' (ii) and to adulterers who commit infanticide (iv). However, Jerome's expression of alarm at the devastation of the Empire (xvif.) shows that such opponents as he had no desire for its collapse.

311. e.g. Ep. 130, xix.

312. e.g. Ep. 54, x.

313. i.e., 'love for Christ', Ep. 79, ix.

314. Ep. 48, xv.

of Milan, the city of the Imperial court. In far-off Jerusalem, Jerome had realized that 'aristocratic' friendship was existentially meaningless without the support of a well-ordered social life. His letters had to be delivered! Furthermore, the proximity of the desert monks furnished a constant reminder of the ultimate import of whole-hearted loyalty to Christ. Hence, he could counsel children to reject their parents for the sake of avoiding marriage and, anticipating the obvious criticism, say that what men 'condemn as callous disregard of a parent is really a lively devotion towards God'.<sup>315</sup> This sharp awareness of the arduous character of the ascetic task gives rise to the expectation, implicit throughout his writings, that few will be called to embark upon it. To a widower he writes, 'Your wife can no longer draw you earthwards, but you can follow her as she draws you heavenwards'.<sup>316</sup> Even in that unfortunate treatise against Jovinian he had stated that he had no wish to 'dissolve marriages once contracted'.<sup>317</sup>

Although the circumstances of late Roman Antiquity freed them from conscious preoccupation with the question of Christian identity,<sup>318</sup> the bishop and the monkish scholar, each in his own manner, provide an answer by associating themselves with the growing consensus within the church.

315. Ep. 117, iv.

316. Ep. 118, iv.

317. Adv. Jovin, xii.

318. For most of the questions dealt with here and in the following paragraphs, v. sup. p. 26-30 on the issues implicit in Tertullian's ethic.

In so doing, they decisively reject Tertullian's view of law as the fundamental principle for ordering Christian existence. They propose an alternative means of identification which, however similar its defensive attitude to the world and antipathy to sexuality may be, differs from Tertullian's in two basic respects. First, it matches fear of failure more equally with love of its object.<sup>319</sup> Therefore, whereas the legalist seeks, by rules, to fence off increasing areas of human activity in which he discerns a threat to obedience and so tends to proscribe these as inherently bad (tabu), the ascetic (or mystic) is by his love of the spiritual ideal and so by his very nature less attracted to the things of the flesh. His rejection of these need only take the form of advice and not proscription. Further, the ascetic notion of 'perfection' implies that it is the way of the few to whom it offers a technique of salvation. The legalist offers a system of laws for all men. Thus, paradoxically, while the ethos of asceticism is usually more world-denying than that of legalism, it is the latter, rather than the former, which is the more onerous. If the one has apparently more reason to see the 'world' as evil, the other shows more concern to make everyone see it that way. Asceticism, aware of its 'aristocratic' character, appreciates that it is not in its own interest to demand that

319. Jerome was just as aware as Tertullian of the danger of sin: 'who in this slippery life can be sure of not falling?' (Ep. 79, vii). However, he was more aware of the springs of human behaviour and therefore paid greater attention to man's psychological needs: the soul requires an affection in order to be set in motion. (Ep. 22, xvii).

all should walk its path of perfection. Legalism, more 'democratic' in nature, tends to demand this. Corresponding with this difference, we find that Jerome places much more emphasis on the divine mercy and forgiveness for those who fall than does Tertullian. In one letter he even allows God's forgiveness for the fallen virgin<sup>320</sup> although, elsewhere, he limits this to those who are not subject to a vow.<sup>321</sup>

The preference of asceticism to legalism, with its concomitant stress on the divine mercy, gave rise to a 'double standard' of ethics in the church which Tertullian, with his firm grasp of the unified will of God, tried to avoid. Grace was made the prerogative of the few and the larger part of the church was separated from the world only by baptism, adherence to the Creed, and penitence. This not only created a paternalistic ecclesiastical structure, the virgins, whom the priests were called upon to 'imitate',<sup>322</sup> being effectively excluded from the affairs of the world, but erected a barrier between the bearers of active, Christian virtue and wider society. Thus, the world-denying spirit of asceticism found a form of expression in the structure and character of the church. Jerome's remark concerning the

320. Ep. 22, v : God cannot raise her to her former high status, but he can free her from the penalty incurred by her fall.

321. Adv. Jovin, I, xiii. The introduction of the vow, or transformation of virginity into an institution, thus introduces a new form of rigorism into the manner in which the church treats sexuality.

322. e.g., Jerome, Adv. Jovin. I, xxxiv.



invasion of the church by worldly lust demonstrates that, even before the collapse of the Empire, the church was beginning to turn its attention and energy upon itself. As a result of 'the simple withdrawal from active life of that moral enthusiasm, which is the leaven of society', the church failed, 'for some centuries, to effect any more considerable amelioration in the moral condition of Europe'.<sup>323</sup>

The difference between Tertullian's and later views of Christian identity could be summarized, then, by saying that a more inclusive, ecclesiastical definition was merely added to the traditional concept of perfection. However, although it is clear that there was little change in attitude to the world and to sex, one quite subtle alteration in the idea of perfection can be noted. For all their self-conscious antipathy to 'the form of this world', Ambrose and Jerome have been influenced by their environment. Fundamentally, this 'invasion' was made possible by the achievement of a modus vivendi between Empire and church and, in this context, their sense of solidarity with the world-denying traditions of Christian thought and action dimmed the Fathers' awareness of what was happening. At the purely concrete level, the change is signalled in the increasing claims made for virginity and, to a lesser extent, celibacy. In order to justify the new emphasis, the

323. W.E.H. Lecky, History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, Longmans, Green & Co., 1911, vol. II, p. 155, cf. pp. 181 ff. and v. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 222 f., 350 who is, however, better aware that, in thus redirecting her energies, the church had not abandoned her educative task, nor her universal concern. v. esp. pp. 223-225.

resources of Scripture and tradition were inadequate. While Ambrose may claim to be using alien forms of thought merely to support the claims of revelation, we have noted the influence that Stoic and neo-Platonic ideas had upon him. The resurgence of Platonism in this period is the more sophisticated expression of an increasing restlessness of the human spirit in face of shrinking opportunities for creative endeavour in the political and social spheres under the later Empire.<sup>324</sup> The more popular and, as Augustine was to learn, more vulgar expression of this anxiety to escape from impersonal, autocratic control may be seen in that desert asceticism which influenced Jerome. At both levels of expression, this movement transcended the limits of the Christian community: although the Platonism became increasingly 'Christian' as the fourth century progressed, Manichaeism proved far more intractable.

The influx of these 'new' ideas signifies the inadequacy of traditional resources for the church's self-understanding and, although it implies no conscious change of attitude to the world, the ideas themselves provide the possibility of a more positive estimate. The Platonic conception of existence as a passing shadow of ultimate reality may not rate the world very highly, but it at least sees

324. cf. C.N. Cochrane, *op. cit.* pp. 31f. (on the spread of the mystery religions), 155ff. (on the reasons for the decline of the Empire) who, while stressing the political character of the failure of the Empire, does so in order to bring out the deeper, 'moral and intellectual failure of the Graeco-Roman mind', viz., a defect which 'was intimately connected with the classical logos of power' based on a balance of virtue and chance. Surprisingly, however, Cochrane fails to mention these factors in his account of the growth of monasticism and so overlooks its connection with more sophisticated and often equally esoteric phenomena such as sectarian asceticism and growing aristocratic respect for the ideals of philosophical retirement and virginity. Hence, he dismisses monasticism as a rejection of society and 'reason' or 'the subversion of civilization by barbarism' (v. pp. 268ff.)

temporal affairs in creative tension with the spiritual realm. The significance of the influence of Stoic ideas about 'nature' upon Ambrose is potentially greater. For this allows that God's will may be directly discernible in the world. Of course, this leads to the view that grace is the fulfilment of nature's purpose, which is to sow the seeds by which catholic paternalism was to grow into ecclesiastical absolutism during the Middle Ages.<sup>325</sup>

In accordance with the mood of the age, these ideas were first employed by the church as servants of a radically world-denying ideal. Apologists for the sex ethic which resulted from this often claim that, despite the tradition of world-denial and the growing ascetical spirit of the patristic age, an increased respect for woman<sup>326</sup> and typically feminine qualities<sup>327</sup> may be found in Christian circles. Certainly, by contrast with an increasingly militaristic and hedonistic Empire, the Christian community upholds a courageous gentleness and charity as well as a form of self-sacrifice for which woman is renowned. But when we reflect upon male theologians' account of sexual differentiation, the Fall, chastity and modesty, we may legitimately query whether the 'moral type' of Christianity was as

325. v. esp. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 214, 223ff.: 'A man who feels intensely that the existing bonds of men in society are somehow dislocated, but that the group to which he belongs can consolidate and purify them, will regard the society around him as so much raw material to be absorbed and transformed' (p. 225). Ambrose compares the Creed to the Roman soldier's military oath (De Virginibus, III, iv, 20) and Brown rightly points out the harshness of an age which, 'thinking in terms of military discipline and uniformity', could conceive Christ as the Emperor of his Church, and so entitled to compel the return of deserters (p. 224)

326. D.S. Bailey, op. cit. p. 5. Of course, Bailey realises that 'the ascetical ideal of the philosophies' was more influential. v.pp.5f.100f

327. W.E.H. Lecky, op. cit., vol., II, pp. 358ff.

feminine as Lecky has suggested. Moreover, the teaching on these subjects, together with the growing emphasis on virginity, partially over-rides the value of their 'higher' estimate of marriage. The sexes were equally forbidden polygamy, divorce, fornication or adultery and the unity of the flesh was conceived as a symbol both of God's creation of man and woman and of Christ's sacrificial purchase of the church, but the deeper rationale of the traditional 'double standard', was hardly challenged.<sup>328</sup> The ambivalence of the New Testament attitude to woman was adhered to and, in the teaching regarding virginity, even reinforced. The 'model' of virtuous womanhood reminds her less worthy sisters that their proper place is on the periphery of society.<sup>329</sup>

The 'progress of theological ethics from Tertullian to Jerome would, at first glance, appear to support the view that the dynamics of

328. Bailey (op. cit., p. 101) recognizes all this and, after all his fierce criticisms, rather disarmingly states that the 'manifest' limitations of the tradition are 'to a large extent those of the age'. This conclusion not only raises grave doubts about the existential import of his earlier claim that Christianity's 'loftier' conception of marriage 'transformed the Hebrew conception of the union of husband and wife' (p. 5) but, by hinting at other factors, suggests that the negative character of the patristic view of sex may not be wholly explained by reference to the limitations of the age. His failure to pursue this possibility is due to his unsystematic methodology which enables him to rest content with external, and usually psychological, explanations of the tradition. cf. sup. note 43, on p. 14.

329. Hence, laws dealing with marriage and sexual matters under the Christian Emperors did little more than introduce an element of tenderness and modicum of equity previously lacking. v. C.N. Cochrane, op. cit. pp. 198ff; 326 f.

change originate wholly outside the theological principle. Quite apart from the somewhat subtle and largely unconscious changes evident in the work of Ambrose and Jerome, even Cyprian's reassertion of the traditional perspective might seem to have occurred basically in response to his situation.<sup>330</sup> Such a view, however, overlooks the controlling function of ideas inherited from the past. This refers, not just to the capacity which venerated principles possess to resist change, but to their capacity to absorb and thus provide a ready vehicle for change (or re-emphasis). In the period which we have been examining, this is especially true of the idea of the Spirit (or especially in the cases of Ambrose and Jerome, the spirit). Since the third person of the Trinity was less subject to the rigours of credal definition than the others, this is not surprising. It should further be emphasized that, at least for Tertullian and Cyprian, the 'discovery' of new depths of meaning in this principle of the Christian life was the product of a highly self-conscious and critical 'testing' of the faith and thus a response to a new situation, not a determination by it.<sup>331</sup>

The same can hardly be said for Ambrose or Jerome whose influence by the ideas and other phenomena of their environment was

330. Especially since the early Cyprian was so close in thought to Tertullian, v. sup. pp. 31 ff. and note 141.

331. Of course, the range of options is largely determined by the situation.

most unwitting. The urbane approach of the one and the volatile flight of the other represent but the positive and negative poles of dependence upon Roman order for the establishment of Christian identity. Small wonder that, despite all his criticisms of 'worldly' existence, Jerome was appalled at the sight of the Empire's approaching demise.<sup>332</sup> Might not the church revert to its former obscurity if Rome fell? The year following this expression of alarm saw the completion of the Empire's humiliation by Alaric and his 'barbarian' troops in the sack of Rome. The effects of this shock, however, led a greater than Jerome, armed with a new appreciation of the Biblical notion of grace and a firm conviction of the contrast between 'the city of God' and 'the temporal city', to attempt a fresh answer to Jerome's question.

332. Jerome, Ep. 123, xvif.

ETHICS AS TRANSCENDENCE : Augustine.

The scope of our enquiry precludes the possibility of giving an adequate survey of the life and work of Augustine. In the following pages, the significance of his massive theological output, both for his own troubled age and for the later history of Christian thought, will only begin to appear. Augustine wrote most of his theological works while he was bishop of the North African town of Hippo. He had been born in Thagaste, another town in North Africa, in A.D. 354 and, as a result of his father's self-sacrifice,<sup>1</sup> had received a classical education. He became a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage but, in order to further his career, he decided to seek an appointment in Rome. In 384, after little more than a year in Rome, he went to Milan, where the Imperial court was then situated. While he was in Milan, Augustine was able to meet some of the outstanding representatives of late Roman culture, including the neo-Platonists, and, of course, it was there that he was converted to Christianity. After his baptism, he returned to Africa and established a monastic community. However, three years later, in 391, the congregation at Hippo constrained him to accept ordination as its priest. He was bishop of Hippo from 395 until his death in 430. When he died, the Vandals were at the gates of the City and, although he must have realized that the collapse of the Empire

1. Augustine harshly states that the provision of his education 'was more a matter of my father's ambition than of his means'. (Confessions, II, iii, 5). This statement reflects the negative aspect of his attachment to his mother, a relationship whose implications we shall have further occasion to note. v. inf. p. 105f., 110f..

involved the destruction of much of his own work, it is one of the kindnesses of history that the old man did not have to suffer the sack of the city, and the humiliation of the people whom he had served so long and diligently.<sup>2</sup>

For the most part, Augustine's view of sex is elaborated in treatises and letters which were written for polemical purposes.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, he never attempted to produce a systematic ethic of sex. In this respect, he merely follows the practice of, and the term seems legitimate, the method of his predecessors. However, whereas they tended to presuppose and apply an accepted system of thought, he rarely fails to relate what he is saying to the deeper levels of theological doctrine and, to this extent, is a more 'systematic' ethical thinker than they. This characteristic of his writings becomes especially marked in the period of the Pelagian controversy. In the *De Bono Viduitatis*, a letter to Juliana, a noble Roman widow who was impressed by Pelagius' teachings, he goes out of his way to refute the claims of the Pelagians.<sup>4</sup> Although he may have been

2. For a brief account of the Vandal conquest of North Africa, v. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 423ff. Of course, Augustine had seen enough to know that his life's work in Africa was destroyed.
3. Mention should also be made of his sermons. Considerations of convenience and time have led us to concentrate upon the treatises. It is, perhaps, significant that in the *Retractiones*, a work written shortly before his death, in which he reviews his literary output, he begins by considering the treatises and more formal letters. He died before he was able to proceed to the classification of the remaining material.
4. *De Bono Viduitatis*, xvi, 20 - xviii, 22.



influenced here by his knowledge of the recipient's view, we elsewhere find him castigating the Pelagians for failing, in their writings, to set the discussion about marriage in the context of the doctrine of grace.<sup>5</sup>

His tendency to think in terms of basic principles is, however, more than a product of the far-reaching arguments with Pelagius and his supporters. One proponent of the thesis that patristic ethical treatises were essentially unmethodical acknowledges that the De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, written only two years after his conversion, is a 'conspicuous exception to this unsystematic and occasional literature'.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it is true that Augustine did not attempt to build a systematic edifice of thought. He sought neither a stronghold for protection against the attacks of opponents, nor a monument to his ability as an architect.<sup>7</sup> This laudable 'failure' was due, not just to the mounting pressure of Augustine's varied episcopal duties, but to his conception of truth or wisdom as something above, though not wholly beyond, the mind of man. God 'can be known by the worthy only intellectually, exalted though He is above the intelligent

5. De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia, II, iv-vi.

6. P. Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 37. In a footnote, however, Lehmann adds that 'it must be remembered that the treatise on the Morals of the Catholic Church is a companion of the treatise on the Morals of the Manichees, so that its occasion is more polemical than constructive'. However, the occasion of its production is not necessarily the basic criterion of the character of a literary work. cf. S. Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, The First Love, pp. 231-6.

7. This is the famous charge which Kierkegaard brought against Hegel. v. S. Kierkegaard, The Journals (ed. and trans. by A. Dru), Fontana, 1958, p. 98. This is an entry of 1846, written shortly after the completion of the Concluding Unscientific Postscript. He does not mention Hegel by name in this entry in his Journal.

mind as being its Creator and Author'.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the mind can never achieve equality with its Creator. He 'remains ever possessed of the inviolable and inimitable nature of truth and wisdom' whereas it, despite its desire for deliverance, 'is liable to folly and falsehood'.<sup>9</sup> Hence, wisdom contains a store of truths which can only be discovered by the man who undertakes a diligent search.

When writing this treatise on Christian ethics, Augustine was still a 'babe' in the faith and he retained much of the neo-Platonic confidence in man's ability to progress in wisdom. As 'the love and affection increases in fervour', he wrote, 'mankind cannot but advance with sure and firm step to a life of perfection and bliss'.<sup>10</sup> Nine years later he began writing the Confessions and, already, he had learned to appreciate that the path of wisdom was strewn with obstacles which the conscious mind lacked the capacity to surmount. The conviction is the more significant for being related to that period of his life which lay behind him even as he wrote the De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, during most of which, he testifies to God, 'I became more wretched and Thou didst come nearer'.<sup>11</sup> This sense of a purposive divine ground of existence is evident throughout the Confessions and guarantees the unity of the work. For it enables Augustine to appreciate that his misguided quest for truth, which symbolizes the uncertainty of 'temporal life',<sup>12</sup>

8. De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, xii, 20.

9. Ibid, xii, 21.

10. Ibid, xiv, 24.

11. Conf. VI, xvi, 26.

12. e.g. Conf. VIII, i, 1.

was due, not to his apparent wilfulness, but to forces which God alone can control.<sup>13</sup> However, the acceptance of God's providential care, while it replaces the uncertainty with 'greater steadfastness',<sup>14</sup> involves the recognition that man's historical journey must continue. Hence, the climax of the work is not the conversion and return homewards, as if these signified the successful completion of life's quest, but deep inquiry into the basis of the individual's relationship with God which culminates, appropriately, in an exposition of the Biblical account of creation and concludes with an exhortation to continue the search for truth.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Augustine bears witness to the fact that he stands on the threshold of a new phase of life<sup>16</sup> whose key-note is assurance yet not complacence. Since its basis consists in knowing the source of all things, such assurance can dispense with the need to know all things which now appears as the 'malady of curiosity' whose self-vindicating pride is firmly opposed to the humility and fear inherent in the knowledge of God.<sup>17</sup> Augustine's

13. Even the boyish prank of stealing pears from an orchard reflects the radical character of evil (v. Conf., II, ix, 17f.) The attention which Augustine pays to this incident has puzzled readers who did not share his understanding of evil. cf. e.g. Oliver Wendell Holmes' comment to Harold Laski, Jan. 15, 1921: 'Rum thing to see a man making a mountain out of robbing a peartree in his teens'; in Holmes-Laski Letters (I), ed. M. de W. Howe, 1953, p. 300 (Cited in P. Brown, op. cit., p. 172, note 5).
14. Conf., VIII, i, 1.
15. Conf., X - XIII; esp. XIII, xxxviii, 53, which brings the work to a close by recalling the quotation of Matthew 7: 7f. in XII, i, 1 with which he began his exegesis of the first chapters of Genesis.
16. The Confessions were written around 397, that is, shortly after Augustine had entered upon his new style of life as bishop of Hippo.
17. Conf. X, xxxv, 54 - xxxvi, 59; cf. V, iv, 7.

determination to maintain an open mind on particular questions has its source here. When, some years later, he remonstrates with Vincentius Victor, a young and impetuous Donatist convert, upon the difficulties and dangers (of heresy) implicit in the question of the origin of the soul, he speaks not just as an old man and a bishop.<sup>18</sup> Without foreclosing discussion of the matter, he wants to recall the young man to the basis of faith in 'the true Mediator', whom God in his 'secret mercy hast revealed to the humble, and hast sent to them so that, through his example, they also might learn the same humility'.<sup>19</sup>

The systematic quality of Augustine's mind, evident again in the warnings to Vincentius Victor, means that it is quite feasible to present his thought on any subject as the elaboration of his presuppositions.<sup>20</sup> This method involves, however, a sacrifice of the movement and development in his thought as well as an inadequate appreciation of those basic ideas, such as the providence of God and the temporality of existence, which not only allow, but require, a mind open to direction by the future course of events. Like Tertullian, Augustine professed ideas which demanded clarification both in their existential import and in their consequences for man's ultimate belief. Unlike his African predecessor's ideas,

18. *De Anima et Ejus Origine*, III, IV. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 363f. tends to regard Augustine's reaction to Vincentius as merely that 'of an elderly bishop'.

19. Conf. X, xliii, 68; cf. *De Anim. et Ejus Orig.*, III.

20. v. e.g. E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, (trans. by L. Lynch). Gollancz, London, 1961.

those of Augustine contained no promise that this task could be completed this side of death. In order to appreciate his teachings on matters of sexuality, then, it is important to take note of its historical origin and, thus, to see what factors, both ideological and occasional, were in the ascendant.

As a theologian and a bishop, Augustine fought on three main fronts. In the years immediately following his conversion, the chief opponents were the Manichees whose doctrine he himself had adopted and advocated before leaving Africa to pursue his career as a teacher of rhetoric, first in Rome, then in Milan.<sup>21</sup> After his return to Africa and even before he was forced to abandon his earlier ideal of a life of withdrawal from organized society, Augustine found himself increasingly involved in the African ecclesiastical schism between the Catholics and the Donatists. His deep sense of a universal human need for authority in the pursuit of truth, forged during the controversy with Manichaeism, made him a stern and uncompromising opponent of Donatist separatism, and its ideal of a 'pure' church, based on an unbroken succession of loyal bishops, many of whom had given a final proof of their faith through martyrdom.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Augustine's most famous controversy, remembered as much because of its significance for the development of European thought and history as for its intrinsic importance, was with the Pelagians

21. *y. Conf.*, III, vi, 10.

22. In other words, the Donatists were chiefly concerned with 'ritual purity'. cf. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-225 for a discussion, with further references, of the issues involved in the Catholic-Donatist struggle.

concerning the implications of grace and free-will.

These controversies furnished the occasion for much, though certainly not all, of Augustine's theological output. The work for which, alongside of the *Confessions*, he has been best remembered, De Civitate Dei, was inspired by an occasion which was composed of a curious combination of momentous and trivial elements -- the sack of Rome and the consequent presence in Carthage of a small band of pagan emigres highly critical of Christianity's effect upon the destiny of the empire.<sup>23</sup> The continuing interest in this work, which is but one aspect of its continuing influence, is sufficient testimony to the manner in which its ideas and their development transcend their relevance to the original situation of Augustine. However, most of his ideas on human sexuality were elaborated in far closer connection with the polemical issues in which he engaged. Until the outbreak of the Pelagian controversy, his sex ethics must be seen in the context of his opposition to Manichaeism, even though his treatment of sexual matters did not always arise in specific response to Manichee claims.<sup>24</sup> The Donatist controversy had little more than tangential influence on the development of Augustine's ideas on sex. His opposition to sectarianism did find expression in an

23. It is probably safe to say that, as far as Augustine was concerned at the time, the chief cause for anxiety lay, not in the sack of Rome, but in the claims of the pagan noblemen, for he would still have taken the survival of the Empire for granted. v. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-312, esp. pp. 294-303.

24. For example, the treatise De Bono Conjugali was produced in response to the views expressed by Jovinian and to Jerome's irate reaction to them, cf. *sup.* p. 63.

attack upon a distorted version of the Donatist claim to parity,<sup>25</sup> but his chief weapon was the assertion of catholic authority. The final articulation of his views on sexual matters occurs almost wholly in response to the attacks of the Pelagians. We begin, therefore, by examining the relevant works produced before the outbreak of Augustine's bitter argument with Pelagius and his followers.

In these works, Augustine develops ideas most of which, if not already expressed by his predecessors, are at least latent in their thought. Thus, the most notable feature of Augustine's early theological writings, especially for anyone acquainted with post-Freudian analyses of his intellectual development, is the calm assurance with which he elaborates the implications of his fundamental principles. In the De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae, for example, we find that a genuine appreciation of family life is possible within the structure of Christian Platonism. Certainly, there is a polemical purpose operative here. In the companion work, De Moribus Manichaeorum, Augustine castigates the way in which the Manichees forbid the 'elect', or true members of their sect to marry, because they believe that procreation imprisons the soul in the flesh, yet allow the followers, or adherents of their sect to do so, 'for the gratification of passion'.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Augustine does not have to stretch the meaning of his

25. v. P. Brown, op. cit., p. 218.

26. De Moribus Manichaeorum, xviii, 65.

presuppositions in order to achieve his polemical purpose of refuting the Manichaean view.

Augustine's dissatisfaction with Manichaean doctrine devolved upon the two basic and inter-connected issues of cosmology and the nature of evil.<sup>27</sup> Like Tertullian, the Manichees posited a materialistic account of reality, but, unlike the Christian theologian, they were led to account for the presence of evil by a radical dualism. Augustine drew upon the ideas of the neo-Platonists in order to overcome their claims. The deficiencies of their cosmology, the details of which need not concern us, he attributes to their ignorance 'of that other reality, true Being'. Since they can only think in terms of 'corporeal forms', their picture of reality consists of 'fantasms' in which God may be thought of 'in the analogy of a human body' or conceived 'to be some kind of body in space, either infused into the world, or infinitely diffused beyond the world'. Hence they fail to 'know that God is a spirit who has no parts extended in length and breadth, whose being has no mass', and they are 'entirely ignorant as to what is that principle within us by which we are like God, and which is rightly said in Scripture, to be made "after God's image"'.<sup>28</sup>

27. v. e.g., Conf. III, vi, 10f; IV, xv, 24ff.; VII, i, 1f.; XIII, xxx, 45, and V, x, 18ff.; VIII, x, 22f., for Augustine's characterization of the Manichaean cosmology and account of the origin and nature of evil. Other, relatively brief, accounts of the Manichees' views may be found in *De Mor. Manich.* and *Contra Epistolam quam vocant Fundamenti.* For a brief survey of Manichaeism, v. P. Brown, *op.cit.*, pp.46-60 (This also provides further references).

28. Conf. III, vii, 12; VII, i, 1.



In place of this entanglement of false imaginations which are impressed on the memory by bodily senses, then, Augustine sets forth 'the freedom and purity of spiritual existence',<sup>29</sup> of which God is the immutable substance, whose majesty, 'appears . . . as not only above the human body, but above (the) mind itself!'<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, as we have seen already, 'the inner man', or 'spirit of the mind' is made in the image of God<sup>31</sup> and is the means by which man can see God or 'attain to wisdom'.<sup>32</sup> Since God is 'our perfect good',<sup>33</sup> this achievement signifies the successful completion of mankind's universal quest for 'happiness'.<sup>34</sup>

Truth and goodness, then, are nothing but two aspects of 'true Being'. In other words, a common ontological foundation guarantees their essential unity. This (neo-) Platonic conception of the good as inherent in the structure of reality enables Augustine to reject the Manichean claim to give an adequate account of the origin and character of evil. Their materialism had forced the Manichees to admit that evil, like good, has a substantial basis. Thus, in opposition to the material principle of good, 'called a Monad', they set a material principle of evil, 'called a Dyad',<sup>35</sup> and, what was even more scandalous to Augustine the Christian, the latter was conceived to be the more active, capable of leading astray

29. C. Ep. q.v. Fund., xxiii, 25.

30. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., x, 17.

31. Contra Faustum Manichaeum, xxiv, 2.

32. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., vi, 9; vii, 11.

33. Ibid, viii, 13.

34. Ibid, xi, 18.

35. Conf. IV, xv, 24.

those who were originally subject to God, 'the chief good'.<sup>36</sup> Augustine opposes 'those fancies which are originated by the carnal sense',<sup>37</sup> with the picture of the world as a good, indeed 'very good', creation of the autonomous will of God.<sup>38</sup> Its goodness is explained in Platonic terms as participation in God, the 'one good which is good supremely and in itself', that is, 'by its own nature and essence'. Since the good of creation is 'bestowed' by God and not inherent in its own nature, it 'is liable to hurt through falling away. This, then, is evil, which consists in mere 'negation or loss' and, lacking all essence, cannot be attributed to God, 'for He is author of existence and being'.<sup>39</sup>

In order to appreciate the character of this 'falling away' we shall have to develop the Augustinian ontology more fully. This will also enhance our understanding of the influence which Platonic cosmology had upon him. In the penultimate book of the Confessions, he fastens upon the Psalmist's phrase 'the heaven of heavens' and refers it to God's pre-temporal creation of a sphere of wisdom which 'abides in true contemplation of him alone'. In comparison with 'that chaste city of thine', he confesses, 'the heaven of our own earth is only earth', being formed from the unformed matter which God himself created.<sup>40</sup> This picture, of a series of 'descending' layers of creation reflects the

36. C. Faust. Man. xxii, 22; cf. Conf., VII, ii, 3.

37. C. Ep. q.v. Fund., xliii, 49.

38. e.g. Conf., XIII, xxviii, 43.

39. De Mor. Man., iv, 6. As the variation in quoted sources suggests, this doctrine of evil is rehearsed in many of Augustine's works.

40. Conf., XII, ii, 2; xv, 18-22.

Platonic conception of a series of emanations originating in the One and finishing with the impression of forms upon an uncreated, primordial matter. However, a firm assertion of the doctrine of creation de nihilo<sup>41</sup> enables Augustine to maintain the Biblical notion of divine transcendence and, at the same time, to heighten the Platonic conception of the continuity within creation by making it all-inclusive.

The essential feature of this continuity, or, to use the term which Augustine prefers, 'harmony',<sup>42</sup> is its 'orderly arrangement'.<sup>43</sup> This consists in the establishment of difference levels within creation and, since order has its source in unity, it betokens the work of God, the divine unity. What distinguishes the different layers of creation from one another is the differing degree to which they participate in the divine unity. Now, as we have already noted, this divine unity is the source of both being and goodness. Hence the more simple a thing is, the more it may be said to exist and be good. Taken separately, then, the various parts of creation are 'good', but taken together they are 'very good', for the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts. Augustine regards this as the explanation of the reports, in Genesis, of God's view of the different 'days' of his creative work.<sup>44</sup>

41. v. e.g. Conf. XI, v, 7.

42. e.g. Conf., VII, xiii, 19.

43. De Mor. Man., vi, 8.

44. Conf. XIII, xxviii, 43; (v. Genesis 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

To 'fall away from God', then, is to tend towards non-existence which implies corruption or harm done to nature. However, Augustine admits that this is quite appropriate in 'the lower grades of creation' since 'these compound things' only imitate unity by the agreement of their parts' and, thus, do not 'exist by themselves' but are subject to decay and, finally, extinction or death.<sup>45</sup> This, he asserts, is no sign of disorder. On the contrary, since 'transition gives them being' and death 'gives them individuality', we should be able to appreciate the 'order and proportions' of 'this lowest form of beauty.'<sup>46</sup>

In the natural realm, then, evil is not really found at all. Inferior things are merely 'considered evil'. Confronted only with them, we 'should indeed desire something better', but, insofar as they exist, they 'are good, and in themselves are good'.<sup>47</sup> However, the rational souls which 'fall away from God' also fail to upset the divine order because they are relegated to 'the lower grades of creation where their proper place is'.<sup>48</sup> Having rejected the Manichaean view that the divine order remains passive in the face of attacks from the realm of evil, Augustine elaborates a doctrine of the privative character of evil which leads to the conclusion that evil cannot create any disturbance whatsoever. This logical consequence can be veiled, however, by either adopting a limited view of the subject or subtly introducing

45. De Mor. Man. vi, 8 - vii, 9, forms the basis of most of this and the preceding paragraph.

46. C. Ep. q.v. Fund., xli, 47.

47. Conf. VII, xiii, 19.

48. De Mor. Man., vii, 9.

an essential element into the privative scheme. The soul which falls is entitled to regard this event as a catastrophe, while the image of corruption<sup>49</sup> suggests that evil is not only privative, but parasitic, that is, it conveys the impression that evil has some minimal participation in essential being, and that this is potentially destructive. As we shall shortly see, this image forms the basis for Augustine's account of the human predicament.

How is it that the rational soul falls away from God? In other words, whence is the origin of evil? By dividing reality into 'the Kingdom of light' and 'the kingdom of darkness',<sup>50</sup> each ruling its own subjects, the Manichees absolved the individual from the responsibility for evil or his sin.<sup>51</sup> In firm opposition to this view, Augustine gives us his simplest answer to the question concerning the source of evil. 'The origin of sin is in the will; therefore in the will is also the origin of evil, both in the sense of acting against a just precept, and in the sense of suffering under a just sentence'.<sup>52</sup> The Platonists too, referred the presence of evil to the role of the will, but in this they were assisted by their conception of the duality of soul and body. Since the latter is not wholly the creation of the intelligible realm, man's composite being confronts him with a radical choice between two alternative

49. v. e.g. *Ibid*, v, 7; *C. Ep. g.v. Fund.*, xxxv, 39ff.

50. *De Mor. Man.*, iii, 5.

51. v. esp. *Conf.*, V, x, 18., This passage still reflects something of the appeal which this doctrine must have possessed for the young Augustine, burdened with a heavy sense of guilt, cf. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-53.

52. *C. Faust. Man.*, xlii, 22.

'goods', namely, those of the soul and the body. Since, as we have seen in Augustine's thought, the temporality of the body is the condition of individuality, choice of its 'good' may be defined as 'self-will' or 'the desire for self-ownership' which means 'entry into the sphere of process'.<sup>53</sup>

The doctrine of creation de nihilo prevented Augustine from advancing such a neat solution, not just because it implied a less hostile attitude to the 'flesh' but because it limited the autonomy of the will.<sup>54</sup> The will remains the agent of free choice, the means by which the rational soul moves man to engage in his varied activities,<sup>55</sup> but, as the affective aspect of the soul, it requires a principle whereby it may itself move and so be enabled to fulfil its proper task. This principle Augustine compares with the 'weight' or 'gravity' of a body which impels it to find 'rest' and peace' in 'its own', or proper, 'place'. Man's 'weight' is his 'love' which carries him where it will.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the object of man's love determines the 'place' which he finds in the 'order' of creation. However, this determination is not a result of the application of external force, which would destroy its voluntary

53. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 1: 1, cited in Augustine: *Confessions And Enchiridion*, (trans. and ed. by A. Outler), The Library Of Christian Classics, vol. VII, S.C.M., London, 1955, p. 150.

54. By emphasizing its limited character as part of the order of creation. When the power of the will is thus limited, it becomes impossible to assign the origin of evil wholly to the will and, despite a strong inclination to do so, Augustine was never content with this solution. To suggest, as does Gilson (op. cit., pp. 143-157, esp. pp. 146f., 150f.) that he was, involves a failure to appreciate the depth of the problem of evil for Augustine. Gilson's oversight is surprising since he recognizes the limitations which Augustine sets to the will's freedom. cf. further inf. p.p. 142f..

55. Including both those which depend upon the mind alone, such as contemplation, and those which involve the body.

56. Conf., XIII, ix, 10.

character, but the presence of a principle which, whatever be the estimate of its actual value, is integral to the will.<sup>57</sup>

This analysis of the nature of the will, while it provides the anthropological foundation of the quest for happiness,<sup>58</sup> serves merely to heighten the problem of the appearance of evil in the created order. Since the latter is wholly good, it is impossible to conceive how the will, its love properly established, could manifest that disobedience which Augustine asserted against the Manichees to be 'the origin of evil'. The Confessions reveal Augustine wrestling with this intractable problem. In his analysis of the petty theft which he committed during his boyhood, we find him canvassing the possibility of radical evil, that is, sheer love of sin, something completely irrational in human wrongdoing. But he concludes, in the only way possible for one whose picture of reality leaves no room for the inexplicable, with the Psalmist's phrase: 'who can understand his errors?'<sup>59</sup> Within his ontological framework evil must appear, not as something radical, but as something incomprehensible,

57. Thus Augustine does not offer direct support to either side in the Jansenist controversy. God's grace does not determine the will from without, as Jansen suggested, but neither does it leave room for an option such as the Thomistic account of the voluntary requires. The latter view of the role of 'free choice' (Gilson, op. cit.; p. 162) is closer to Augustine's only because he thought that the operation of grace could never be complete under the conditions of temporal existence and, therefore, that the love of God not only moves man from within, but places him under an obligation. cf. further inf., pp. 97ff., 138ff..

58. v. e.g. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., iii, 4: Conf., I, i, 1.

59. Conf. II, iv, 9 - x, 18. (Ps. 19:12).

'a strange anomaly'.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, he continues to seek an explanation, which is what we should expect from one who was so assured of the supreme rationality of God and creation. In the analysis of his boyish theft, he discovers a wide range of factors: need of friendship and consequent desire for friends' approval, pride, desire for status and power, and the 'comeliness in all beautiful bodies.' Behind all these lies the 'peculiar attractiveness' of our temporal life which has 'a certain measure of comeliness of its own and a harmony with all these inferior values'. Elsewhere, he refers to the force of 'habit'.<sup>61</sup> Such influences cannot be denied but they all presuppose a disruption of the original harmony set forth by Augustine. Hence, he considers other possibilities, notably, since it is fraught with significance for the future of his own and later Christian theology, something approximating to the Platonic explanation. Referring, in another work, to the significance of Adam's sin, he states that, 'our experience gives us abundant evidence, that in punishment for this sin, our body is corrupted, and weighs down the soul, and the clay tabernacle clogs the mind in its manifold activity'.<sup>62</sup> In the Confessions, he contrasts concupiscence and the love of Christ as radical alternatives for man.

60. Conf. VIII, ix, 21.

61. e.g. Conf. VIII, v, 10ff. What gave rise to this 'baggage of the world' he thinks, was a succession of voluntary acts of will. Further, it was 'the enemy', the devil, who had thus 'made' his will 'a chain'. This suggests that he had not acted entirely by 'free choice' in delivering himself to the bondage of evil.

62. C. Faust. Man., xxii, 78.



'They are both feelings; they are both loves' but the former 'flows downward with the love of worldly care', while the latter involves being raised by the spirit and 'the love of release from anxiety' until we reach 'that supreme rest' of our souls.<sup>63</sup>

The strong neo-Platonic background to Augustine's early theological thought gives rise to a number of ethical features, some of which we have already met, especially in the writings of Ambrose. It enables him, with less reserve than his eminent predecessor, to adopt the classical scheme of virtue.<sup>64</sup> Since virtue is 'nothing else than perfect love of God', he writes, the classical 'fourfold division of virtue' into temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence, may be regarded as the representation of 'four forms of love'.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the fact that Augustine makes love for God a prior condition of the will's action, does not prevent his conceiving the Christian life as the individual's pursuit of merit. 'Let us then', he exhorts his readers, 'as many as have in view to reach eternal life, love God with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind. For eternal life contains the whole reward in the promise of which we rejoice; nor can the reward precede desert, nor be given to a man before he is worthy of it'.<sup>66</sup> His increasing appreciation of the need for grace led Augustine to modify only the emphasis, never the form, of this conception

63. Conf. XIII, vii, 8.

64. Of course, this was not the prerogative of the neo-Platonists. Enshrined in Cicero's *De Officiis*, though by this time already traditional, the four-fold scheme of virtue rather reflects the Stoic conception of 'nature'.

65. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xv, 25.

66. Ibid, xxv, 47.

of the Christian life. In the Confessions, despite the fact that certain passages were to offend Pelagius, he can still call upon man to 'ascend and live', to imitate the divine humility of the Incarnation 'that you may climb up, climb up to God'.<sup>67</sup>

This ascent, as we have seen, is conceived in terms of a progression of like towards like, the rational soul towards wisdom and the contemplation of God. Neither of these belongs to the material realm and virtue, therefore, is pictured in terms of transcendence of 'worldly care',<sup>68</sup> which includes 'the chain of sexual desire' and 'the slavery of worldly business'.<sup>69</sup> Hence, we find an implicit rejection of 'passions' and the 'flesh'.<sup>70</sup> Even compassion, which might be regarded as a relatively lofty form of temporal feeling, was regarded by Augustine as something from which the wise man should be free because it implies suffering and, therefore, 'worldly care'.<sup>71</sup>

The celibates, especially the anchorites, are set forth as 'perfect Christians' who live by the vision of 'something transcending human things in contemplating which man can live without seeing his fellow man' and are recommended by their abstention from meat and wine 'in order to gain the mastery over their passions'.<sup>72</sup> In short, 'God alone, to find whom is the happiest life, must be worshipped in perfect purity and chastity,

67. Conf. IV, xii, 19.

68. Conf. XIII, vii, 8.

69. Conf. VIII, vi, 13.

70. v. e.g. Conf., VI, 1, 2; v, 10f.; vii, 17f.

71. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxvii, 53.

72. Ibid, xxxi, 65; 67.

bringing in no creature as an object of adoration whom we should be required to serve'.<sup>73</sup>

Within this framework, however, there is room for the appreciation of friendship. The model of friendship is that of 'man to man',<sup>74</sup> and the classical basis of its conception is further revealed when we read that the anchorites 'live without seeing their fellow-creatures though not without loving them'.<sup>75</sup> Just as sight is the sense which furnishes the primary means of attaining knowledge, so it forms the basis of friendship. In each case, the superior form is found in that inward sight of the mind or rational soul which can dispense with that minimal degree of bodily contact which is visual perception. Thus friendship is analogous to the relationship of the rational soul to God and Augustine states that 'we can think of no surer step towards the love of God than the love of man to man'.<sup>76</sup> An important implication of this rationalistic conception of friendship is that the rational order must be respected and that, what man aims at in himself he must aim at in his neighbour, 'namely, that he may love God with a perfect affection. For you do not love him as yourself, unless you try to draw him to that good which you yourself are pursuing. For this is the one good which has room for all to pursue it along with thee'.<sup>77</sup>

Although Augustine considers that a perfect community is a group of rational souls who, dispensing with the need for any other form of

73. Ibid, xxx, 62.

74. Ibid, xxvi, 48.

75. Ibid, xxxi, 65.

76. Ibid, xxvi, 48.

77. Ibid, xxvi, 49.

contact, are concerned with each other's spiritual welfare, he does allow 'worldly care' for the neighbour's body. After all, the classical scheme of virtue was oriented towards the social needs of man. Hence, it is proper for the Christian reasonably and wisely to supply all the things required for warding off the 'evils and distresses' of bodily existence. Such men 'are called compassionate' and, though from an ultimate perspective compassion signifies a deficiency, it is legitimate under the conditions of temporal existence. However, Augustine betrays his continuing suspicion of such 'worldly' concern for man's neighbour by his attempt to equate compassion with benevolence which implies acting 'with tranquillity of mind, not from the stimulus of painful feeling', and by his claim that it originates in 'a sense of duty without feeling also distressful emotion'.<sup>78</sup> With the idea of duty, however, we are entering another, equally important, dimension of Augustine's thought.

Even in his earliest theological writings, Augustine had begun to doubt the Platonists' confidence in reason's ability to attain the beatific vision by its own power. This was partly due to his own experience of the ephemeral character of such visions. When he was a Platonist, his mind had pursued that inward ascent, withdrawing 'its

78. Ibid, xxvii, 53f..

perience' and seeking that which is 'unchangeable',  
 thoughts from <sup>79</sup>flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at that which is.  
 until 'with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at that which is'.<sup>79</sup>

Neither then, nor at the time of his similar post-conversion vision at Ostia with his mother,<sup>80</sup> was Augustine 'able to sustain (his) gaze'.<sup>81</sup> Soon he would be writing that the faculty of reason, when it comes 'to divine things . . . turns away; it cannot behold it; it pants and gasps, and burns with desire; it falls back from the light of truth, and turns again to its wonted obscurity, not from choice but from exhaustion'.<sup>82</sup>

This statement occurs in a work which has 'the ignorant and profane attacks' made by the Manichees against Christian truth very much in mind,<sup>83</sup> and we may be sure that his experience then, both as a member and an opponent of the sect, also played a major part in Augustine's appreciation of the limitations of unaided reason. Italian aristocrats might overlook the aberrations of human reason, but Augustine could not do so.

Hence arises the need for sure guidance and Augustine's deep and growing respect for authority. When reason fails, 'when we are hastening to retire into darkness, it will be well that by the appointment of adorable Wisdom, we should be met by the friendly shade of authority, and should be attracted by the wonderful character of its contents, and

79. Conf. VII, xvii, 23.

80. Conf., IX, x, 23ff.

81. Conf., VII, xvii, 23.

82. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., vii, 11.

83. Ibid, i, 1.

by the utterances of its pages, which, like shadows, typify and attemper the truth'.<sup>84</sup> Scripture, then, is man's divinely established authority in the quest for Truth and, as the final sentence of this statement suggests and Augustine first learned from Ambrose, the rule for its proper interpretation is provided in the text: 'The letter kills, but the spirit gives life'. By this means Ambrose 'drew aside the mystic veil and opened to view the spiritual meaning of what seemed to teach perverse doctrine if it were taken according to the letter'.<sup>85</sup> We see Augustine applying the Ambrosian method in the concluding books of the Confessions where, for example, the statement in the creation narrative that the Spirit 'was "moving over" the waters' is taken to signify the love by which the Spirit lifts man up from the 'deep abyss' of concupiscence<sup>86</sup>

The allegorical hermeneutic furnished Augustine with an excellent means of establishing the unity of Scripture and so of rebutting the Manichees' criticism of the God and morality of the Old Testament.<sup>87</sup> The fault lay, not in the text of Scripture, but in their literal interpretation of it which was merely another sign of their inadequate, 'material imaginations'.<sup>88</sup>

By thus committing himself to the view that the teachings of the Old Testament 'harmonize' with those of the New<sup>89</sup> Augustine was led to

84. Ibid, vii, 11.

85. Conf., VI, iv, 6 (II Cor., 3:6)

86. Conf., XIII, vii, 8.

87. v. e.g. Conf., V, xiv, 24; C. Faust. Man., 94f.; De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xvii, 30. Augustine also sets great store by the widespread acceptance of the authority of Scripture (e.g. Conf. VI, v, 8; De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxix, 60f.; C. Faust., Man., xxxii, 19) and the testimony of the New Testament, especially Matthew (e.g. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxix, 59f.; cf. xvii, 30f.; C. Faust. Man. xvii - xix) in his arguments for the unity of Scripture.

88. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xvii, 32.

89. Ibid, ix, 14f.

emphasize the validity of the law for the Christian. 'The law given by Moses is that which, by Jesus Christ, became grace and truth'.<sup>90</sup> This might seem to be contradicted by Augustine's recognition that the Christian is under no obligation to keep the cultic regulations or the Sabbath commandment of the Old Testament. However, he does keep them inasmuch as what they 'prefigured . . . is fulfilled in Christ'. Thus, for circumcision, which 'was the type of the removal of our fleshly nature', we have the improved rite of baptism, which signifies, 'in the resurrection of Christ', the fulfilment of what was merely promised in circumcision, and teaches us what 'to look forward to in our resurrection'. Further, 'we have our Sabbath in Him', who promised rest to the oppressed who imitate His humility.<sup>91</sup>

The consistent emphasis upon the divine law, which is implied in this 'apology' for the Christian's apparent departure from some of its precepts, reflects Augustine's conviction that the Christian life retains at least some of the marks of duty. For all that the law has become for the Christian, 'grace and truth', however much the love that the Spirit imparts to man's soul may have become the spring of his activity, Augustine points out that 'even for those who are under grace, it is difficult in this mortal life perfectly to keep what is written in the law'.<sup>92</sup>

90. C. Faust, *Man.*, xix, 7 (referring to John 1:17, v. e.g. xix, 8, 18)

91. *Ibid.*, xix, 9.

92. *Ibid.*, xix, 7.

Augustine's retention of the law as a category of the Christian life is more than a sign of respect for tradition. It reflects his background of influence by African Christianity whose fierce simplicity may be seen in much of his mother's behaviour as reported in the Confessions. Thus he tells us that it was only because of her 'prophetic' dream that Monica 'permitted me to live with her, to have my meals at the same house, at the table which she had begun to avoid' following her son's adoption 'of that profound darkness' of Manichaeism.<sup>93</sup>

The degree to which Augustine's conception of divine justice was nourished by his reading of the Old Testament may be measured by the failure of his 'neo-Platonic' cosmology to modify it appreciably. The good order of creation which reflects the wisdom of God certainly leads him to equate 'the eternal law' with 'the divine order or will of God' and to state that, 'according to the eternal law . . . the law of nature is preserved'.<sup>94</sup> Hence he claims that miracles involve no disturbance of 'the supreme law of nature' or 'the usual common course of nature'. Already here, however, Augustine states that nature's supreme law 'is beyond the knowledge both of the ungodly and of weak believers',<sup>95</sup> and so frees his concept of true justice from rational control. Thus, in the Confessions, he can write, 'when God commands anything contrary to the customs and compacts of any nation, even though it were never done by them

93. Conf., III, xi, 19.

94. C. Faust. Man., xxii, 27.

95. Ibid, xxvi, 3.



before, it is to be done; and if it has been interrupted, it is to be restored; and if it has never been established, it is to be established. For it is lawful for a king, in the state over which he reigns, to command that which neither he himself or anyone before him had commanded. And if it cannot be held to be inimical to the public interest to obey him -- and, in truth, it would be inimical if he were not obeyed, since obedience to princes is a general compact of human society -- how much more, then, ought we unhesitatingly to obey God, the Governor of all his creatures.<sup>96</sup> The seeds of medieval absolutism were being sown.<sup>97</sup>

If Augustine imbibed much of the Old Testament spirit his refreshment was not derived from that portion of Scripture alone. The sense of freedom from the chains of the past, which is implicit in any form of conversion, he first experienced fully in reading the New Testament.<sup>98</sup> There he continued to find references to man's need for deliverance and God's gracious provision for it concerning which the writings of the Platonists were silent.<sup>99</sup> Yet this was a need which he himself had long felt and whose universality became increasingly clear to him as he faced a series of intractable opponents. Essentially, man's need consists in his incapacity to perform the requirements of the law.<sup>100</sup> In other words,

96. Conf., III, viii, 15.

97. Like most forms of political absolutism, this was based upon the notion of a privileged elite who can see the truth in a way which is considered to be impossible for ordinary mortals. Augustine's view of the over-riding claims of the law of God does no more than foreshadow the claims of the medieval Catholic Church because he continued to take the Imperial authority for granted and, therefore, saw no reason for developing his ecclesiology in terms of a 'worldly' authority of the church. cf. further inf. pp. 158f..

98. Conf., VIII, xii, 28-30.

99. Conf., VII, ix, 13-15; xx, 26 - xxi, 27.

100 e.g. C. Faust. Man., xix, 27.

and this completely accords with his account of evil, Augustine characterizes man's sinfulness as a deficiency. However, and this accords with his use of the image of evil as corruption, Augustine invariably describes man's deficiency as a sickness.<sup>101</sup> As we have seen, he was already tending to identify this sickness with concupiscence, 'the love of this world' which manifests itself in desire for 'pleasures that bear death in them',<sup>102</sup> because, in opposition to 'the divine law', it 'loves for their own sake, things which are desirable only as a means to an end, and seeks for the sake of something else, things which ought to be loved for themselves'.<sup>103</sup>

Like Ambrose, therefore, Augustine conceives grace primarily in terms of healing. God's 'medicine' consists in the provision of a Mediator, often presented in neo-Platonic terms as appearing 'between three, the One, and us, the many',<sup>104</sup> who, by drawing nearer to man, draws him towards the love of God as he learns the humility of the Incarnation and keeps his ransom, earned by the Passion, before his mind.<sup>105</sup> Certainly, then, Augustine's conception of grace is 'personal and psychological' but it does not help our understanding of his thought to contrast this with a claim that it is 'magical and naturalistic'.<sup>106</sup> While the latter view is an exaggeration, man's health not being a fait accompli until the

101 e.g. Conf. X, xxviii, 39, xliii, 68ff.

102 Conf. XIII, xxi, 29.

103 C. Faust. Man., xxii, 78.

104 Conf. XI, xxix, 39; cf. X, xliii, 68.

105 Conf. X, xliii, 68-70.

106. v. A. Nygren, op. cit., pp. 522f.

resurrection, the frequency of references to God as 'Physician',<sup>107</sup> to 'His medicine',<sup>108</sup> and to the sacraments as 'medicines',<sup>109</sup> often without any explanatory comment, betrays a tendency in this direction. Furthermore, Augustine does use the notion of bodily healing as a direct analogy of God's spiritual work and, at the same time, refers the former, as well as the latter, to God. 'Unless His medicine were sent from the heaven to men, so heedlessly do they go on in sin, there would be no hope of salvation; and, indeed, even bodily health, if you go to the root of the matter, can have come to men from none but God, who gives to all things their being and their well-being'.<sup>110</sup> In grace, then, man experiences a 'mysterious power',<sup>111</sup> which arouses wonder such as a child feels when illness is relieved by the work of a skilful doctor. Here, again, we may discern the influence of Augustine's African background with its strong ritual emphasis,<sup>112</sup> nor should we forget the impression which his own experience of conversion made upon him.

Just as Augustine's conception of 'the divine law' foreshadows medieval ecclesiastical developments, so does his conception of grace as the restoration of nature's powers and purposes. While he does not specify where, in institutional terms, true authority may be found, he does designate the body which should provide it, namely, the church.

107. e.g. Conf., X, iii, 4; cf. xxxviii, 39.

108. e.g. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxviii, 55; cf. Conf. X, xxxix, 64.

109. e.g. Conf., IX, iv, 8.

110. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxviii, 55.

111. W. Hermann's interpretation of Augustine's view of grace, cited in A. Nygren, op. cit. p. 522.

112. v. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 212f, 222-224, 244-246.

Augustine regarded the church as a vitally necessary authority for two main reasons. First, it guaranteed the correct approach to Scripture. The first thing that he learned from Ambrose's allegorical exegesis, he tells us, was that 'the Catholic faith, for which I supposed that nothing could be said against the onslaught of the Manicheans . . . could be maintained without presumption'.<sup>113</sup> It is no accident that the work in which he establishes his ethical position against the Manichees is entitled, 'Of The Morals Of The Catholic Church'. The work contains one of the fullest encomiums upon the church in patristic literature.<sup>114</sup> Jerome, in the course of his correspondence with Augustine, had described Scripture as a field (for which he received the other's rebuke).<sup>115</sup> Augustine feared that without the support of the church, Scripture would be at the mercy of conflicting interpretations and so be turned into a battlefield.<sup>116</sup> The other reason for the eminent role assigned to the church by Augustine was that, through its sacraments, God's healing grace was imparted to the faithful.

When Augustine refers to 'our spiritual mother, thy Catholic Church',<sup>117</sup> then, we may be sure that the traditional metaphor bears a new intensity of meaning. Significantly, it is only after his mother's death and his return to Africa that Augustine begins to get involved in ecclesiastical affairs.

113. Conf. V, xiv, 24.

114. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxx, 62f. Despite the scope of his praise of the church, Augustine does not employ the ecstatic, not to say fulsome, language of other writers.

115. v. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 274f.

116. v. e.g. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxix, 61; Conf. VI, v, 7f.

117. Conf., VII, i, 1.

In his later life he will seek the support and apply the influence of the Catholic Church with a determination and, often, a ferocity which stamp him as still the son of Monica and, therefore, of Africa.<sup>118</sup> However, before the church became his mother-substitute, Augustine had sufficient reasons for strongly asserting its authority. Hence, for all the complexity and subtle inter-relationships of his theological principles, he puts forward a picture of Christian identity which is basically identical with that of his predecessors. All types of person may find a proper place in the church since 'in them all the one and selfsame Spirit is at work, dividing to every man his own portion, as He wills'.<sup>119</sup> Thus the church can be praised for its beneficial influence on the life of the family. 'Thou subjectest women to their husbands in chaste and faithful obedience, not to gratify passion, but for the propagation of offspring, and for domestic society. Thou givest to men authority over their wives, not to mock the weaker sex, but in the laws of unfeigned love. Thou dost subordinate children to their parents in a kind of free bondage, and dost set parents over their children in a godly rule. Thou bindest brothers to brothers in a religious tie stronger and closer than that of blood. Without violation of the connections of nature and of choice, thou bringest within the bond of mutual love every relationship of kindred, and

118. This is particularly apparent in his treatment of the Donatists. v. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-243, 330-336.

119. Conf. XIII, xviii, 23.

every alliance of affinity'.<sup>120</sup> Jerome could not have written that. Most of Augustine's other notable predecessors probably would not, and certainly did not, write like that. We must now enquire how Augustine's theological principles breathed new life into the traditional ethical scheme.

An indication of the widespread scandal caused by Jerome's treatise against Jovinian is provided by the fact that this prompted Augustine to write his first treatises devoted specifically to the ethics of sex. These works contain no explicit reference to Jerome, but we may be sure that this is because Augustine's respect for the eminent scholar reinforced his tendency to criticize ideas rather than the persons who advocated them.<sup>121</sup> For, in both De Bono Conjugali and De Sancta Virginitate, we find a clear rejection of what appeared to be Jerome's basic thesis. The former work emphasizes that comparison with fornication and other sexual sins is not sufficient to establish that marriage is good,<sup>122</sup> while the latter points out that the glory of virginal chastity is enhanced if marriage, when compared with it, is still regarded as 'the lesser good' and marriage, when compared with it,<sup>122</sup> is still regarded as 'the lesser good' and not as 'a pitfall of sin'.<sup>123</sup>

approval of sexuality and, hence, of marriage since, despite the ultimate antinomy it discerned between spirit and matter, neo-Platonism allowed

120. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxx, 63.

121. v. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 275 f.

122. De Bono Conjug. viii, 8; x, 11.

123. De Sancta Virg., xviii, 18.

that a modus vivendi could be achieved between the two realms when mind informed and so brought order out of the primordial flux. The ethical implication of this conception of the cosmos was that man should 'provide for the safety of their flesh, and keep their carnal appetites in subjection to the use of reason'.<sup>124</sup> This, of course, is one aspect of the virtue of temperance which 'is love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God'.<sup>125</sup> and which, given the terms of this spiritual love, implies no disparagement of the body, but establishes the limits of 'the love of the soul for the body'.<sup>126</sup> Such love is proper, not only because Scripture sanctions it, but because it reflects 'the law of nature' whereby 'the exercise or indulgence of the bodily appetites is intended to secure the continued existence and the invigoration of the individual or of the species'.<sup>127</sup>

This rational qualification of the material dimension of existence enables Augustine to equate the 'proper' use of sexual intercourse and of food and, further, to admit that 'natural delight' may legitimately accompany their use.<sup>128</sup> However, of all the human desires whose origin is biological, the sexual is the least amenable to limits set by reason. Once unleashed, both its power and its capacity for ecstasy constitute, for the neo-Platonist, a threatening reminder of the primeval chaos which underlies the material realm. 'How can I speak', Augustine asks, 'of the weight of concupiscence which drags us downwards into the deep abyss (?)'.<sup>129</sup> Certainly, he still saw this 'passion or lust' at

124. C. Faust. Man., xxi, 7.

125. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xv, 25.

126. C. Faust. Man., xxi, 7 (referring to Eph. 5:28f.)

127. Ibid. and xxii, 27, 29.

128. De Bono Conjug., xvi, 18.

129. Conf. XIII, vii, 8.

work in the love of gold and of praise as well as in the love of women,<sup>130</sup> for all of these represent man's self-deliverance to the transience and compulsive flux of temporal existence.<sup>131</sup> However, throughout his treatises on marriage and virginity, we find an apprehension of the disorderly character of sexual desire which involves more than a recognition of the seductive character of all inferior, created 'goods',<sup>132</sup> and cannot be explained as an inevitable result of his concentration on the subject of sexuality.

A firm indication of this deep suspicion of sexuality is provided in the treatise on marriage. After a brief resume of the place of marriage in the created order Augustine immediately expresses the doubt whether sexual intercourse would have been the means of procreation had the Fall not intervened.<sup>133</sup> His fundamental reason for casting this aspersion of sin upon the act is that it is the product of desire which goes beyond 'the necessity of begetting',<sup>134</sup> or 'that wherefore marriage was instituted'.<sup>135</sup> In short, and as a general rule, sexual intercourse 'no longer follows reason, but lust'.<sup>136</sup>

Because one of its basic 'goods' is to orient sexual desire towards procreation, however, marriage is capable of providing both a remedy for incontinence and an excuse for the excess of sexual desire which is invariably found within it. Thus, 'carnal or youthful incontinence, although

130. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxii, 41.

131. v. e.g. Conf., IV, x, 15; VIII, i, 11.

132. v. e.g. Conf., II, v, 10.

133. De Bono Conjug., ii, 2.

134. Ibid, xi, 12.

135. Ibid, xvii, 19.

136. Ibid, x, 11.



it be faulty, is brought into an honest use in the begetting of children, in order that out of the evil of lust the marriage union may bring to pass some good';<sup>137</sup> and sexual intercourse for anything more than its proper purpose 'is pardonable in the case of a wife, damnable in the case of an harlot'.<sup>138</sup> The terms in which Augustine here develops the traditional view of marriage's remedial character enable him to avoid the implication, which Jerome had tended to draw, that marriage is inherently sinful. What 'the Apostle' pardons, in I Corinthians, 7, is 'not marriage', for he explicitly states that to marry is no sin, but 'that sexual intercourse, which takes place through incontinence, not alone for the begetting of children, and, at times, not at all for the begetting of children'.<sup>139</sup> Clearly, then, the pardon which marriage 'procures' for such intercourse, like the 'good' which forms its basis, bears an objective character and requires no transformation in the attitudes of the partners.

Despite the consistency of his argument and its capacity to limit the validity of sexual intercourse in the desired manner, Augustine is clearly unhappy with its lack of reference to the attitudes of the persons involved. After his initial description of the remedial quality of marriage, he hastens to add that 'parental affection' can play an important role in tempering 'the lust of the flesh'.<sup>140</sup> Later he goes

137. Ibid, iii, 3.

138. Ibid, xi, 12.

139. Ibid, x, 11.

140. Ibid, iii, 3.

so far as to suggest that the apostolic pardon only applies to the couple 'if in their intercourse they love what is honest more than what is dishonest, that is, what is matter of marriage more than what is not matter of marriage'.<sup>141</sup> It seems likely that the necessity of such concern for personal values was impressed upon him by experience for, in the treatise on marriage, he considers the subject of concubinage at some length<sup>142</sup> and, especially in his evaluation of the woman who is dismissed yet who remains faithful, we see a clear reflection of the episode reported in the Confessions where, due largely to the influence of his mother, the mother of his 'natural son' was 'torn' from his side as an impediment to his marriage and social acceptance in Milan.<sup>143</sup> His argument for the legitimacy of concubinage contains a notable, and perhaps accidental, indication of the impossibility of defining marriage by purely objective criteria. Provided the couple are resolved upon a life-long union, he says, and are prepared to accept the children who may be born to them, even though they may not have desired offspring, then 'perhaps this may, not without reason, be called marriage'.<sup>144</sup> Quite apart from their commitment to one another, however, their willing acceptance of offspring, if not latent in their original motivation, is at least a new, personal factor which has emerged in response to the changed situation of the couple. Hence it is meaningless to refer to their lack

141. Ibid, x, 11.

142. Ibid, v, 5; xiv, 16.

143. Conf. VI, xiii, 23; xv, 25.

144. De Bono Conjug. v, 5. That is, he allows it to be connubium, not the more formally concluded nuptiae.

of desire for children and to pretend that the mere 'fact' that cohabitation leads to procreation is of primary significance. Even here, then, Augustine's concern for personal values is allowed only to inform, never to challenge, the rational precision of the objective definition of marriage.

The Biblical basis of Augustine's thought provided him with reasons for restricting the role of sexual intercourse in marriage still further. Procreation no longer possesses the value which it had for the Jews of Old Testament times. In opposition to the Manichaeans' 'irrational fancy against having children', which led to an attack upon the laws and practices relating to marriage in the Old Testament,<sup>145</sup> Augustine sets forth the 'piety' of 'the Fathers of the time of the Old Testament'. Their desire for children was 'spiritual' for they married, 'not overcome by lust', but 'through the duty of begetting children', which God had laid upon them as 'Christ's progenitors'.<sup>146</sup> Hence their marriage was one of the 'prophetic sacraments' in which 'the mystery of our salvation was veiled'. Following the Incarnation, however, child-bearing ceases to be an anticipation of the promise of God and so marriage becomes a matter of 'honesty' instead of 'piety'. It ensures that children 'may be born in due and honest order'. But, for the Christian, this means that there can be little value in procreation. The marriages of

145. C. Faust. Man., xxii, 30 and ff.

146. For Augustine's use of this phrase, v. e.g., C. Faust. Man., xxii, 64; xxiii, 8.

unbelievers guarantee the continuity of the human race. This argument is based, not just on prudent observation, but on the view that the Christian has 'no obligation from duty to human society'.<sup>147</sup> The minority mentality of the early church, with its secure sense of identity and freedom from social concern, still operates in a period when the church, like it or not, is the most powerful institution within the social framework of an Empire on the verge of breakdown. We should be surprised if the erudite arguments of 'The City of God', which trace the causes of decline to the door of the Empire itself, convinced Volusianus and his circle of pagan revivalists that the influence of the church was wholly beneficial.

The Incarnation transformed the duties of man because it clarified the implications of faith. In particular, Christ taught men to prove their loyalty to God by renouncing their worldly ties. Hence his disciples realize that the 'tribulation of the flesh, without which marriages cannot be', is an indictment of the marital order. In view of Jerome's bitter commentaries on the difficulties of marriage, Augustine pointedly observes that the apostles preferred to ignore this subject and states that he will follow their example.<sup>148</sup> However, he constantly reiterates the detrimental influence of sexual desire and activity upon prayer and whole-hearted devotion to the Lord.<sup>149</sup> Consequently, there is great value in abstention

147. For the preceding argument and terminology, apart from the phrase referred to in the previous note, v. *De Bono Conjug.*, xiii, 15; xvi, 18 - xvii, 19.

148. *De Bono Conjug.*, xiii, 15.

149. e.g. *Ibid.*, ix, 9; x, 11; xii, 14; xxii, 27, xxiv, 32. On each of the latter three occasions Augustine refers, directly or indirectly, to I Corinthians, 7: 32-34. He only refers to Paul's earlier statement in verse 5, which implies the same point of view but also emphasizes its danger to marital welfare, when pointing out that agreement to sexual abstention must be mutual. v. *inf.* p. 117.

from sexual intercourse for the purpose of devotion;<sup>150</sup> 'and believers in Christ are taught not to think carnal connection the chief thing in marriage as if without this they could not be man and wife, but to imitate in Christian wedlock as closely as possible the parents of Christ, that so they may have the more intimate union with the members of Christ'.<sup>151</sup> The married, unless they belong to those few who think primarily 'of the things of the Lord', are inferior members of that spiritual society, the church.

Augustine begins his treatise on marriage with a panegyric on the unity of the human race which, if it reflects the Biblical concept of Adam, also betrays the influence of classical notions of social solidarity. Since God willed that men should be held together 'not only by likeness of kind, but also by bond of kindred', marriage is 'the first natural bond of human society'. The creation of Eve from the side of Adam is 'a sign also of the power of the union' between man and woman.<sup>152</sup> Later he will refer to 'the natural society itself in a difference of sex' as proof that the value of marriage does not depend on its uncertain capacity to bear children.<sup>153</sup> Evidence of Augustine's genuine concern for the quality of the personal relationship in marriage which is but one relatively minor implication of his conception of human solidarity, has already been given. However, although this proves that his appreciation of marital society is not just a pious abstraction, we must note the negative

150. e.g. *De Bono Conjug.*, iii, 3; x, 11.

151. *C. Faust. Man.*, xxiii, 8.

152. *De Bono Conjug.*, i, 1.

153. *Ibid.*, iii, 3.

significance of his statement that the union of man and wife is 'the first natural bond of human society'. This cannot be the highest form of human relationship, for Augustine is a staunch supporter of the view that women constitute an inferior rank of human society. This expresses itself in many different ways in his thought. To Eve is assigned the primary responsibility for the entry of sin into the realm of existence,<sup>154</sup> a calamity whose proportions he will elaborate and emphasize during the Pelagian controversy. The superiority of intelligence over rational action is an analogy of the proper relationship between man and woman,<sup>155</sup> and it ignores the motif of sacrificial concern contained in the Biblical analogy of Christ's lordship over the church (which, of course, he also employs)<sup>156</sup> The Old Testament fathers were justified in their polygamy, not just by their duty to beget, but by the inferiority of women for, just as one master may have several slaves, so one man may have several wives.<sup>157</sup> Love-play is permissible, even for those 'holy men', since by this means they 'accommodate themselves to the nature of the weaker sex in words and actions of subdued playfulness; not in effeminacy, but in subdued manliness'.<sup>158</sup> The genealogy of Christ is traced, in the New Testament, through Joseph because 'the husband, as a man, is the more honourable'.<sup>159</sup> Although

154. v. e.g. Conf., XIII, xiii, 14.

155. v. e.g. Conf., XIII, xxxiv, 49.

156. v. e.g. C. Faust. Man., xxi, 7; cf. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxx, 63.

157. De Bono Conjug., xvii, 20.

158. C. Faust. Man., xxii, 46.

159. Ibid, xxiii, 8.

some of the items in this random list were traditional, as, indeed, was the attitude which they all reinforce, their variety and ubiquity testify to the influence of a personality for whom the immediate, negative significance of conversion was that he 'sought neither a wife nor any other of this world's hopes'.<sup>160</sup>

The other 'goods' of marriage consist in 'faith of chastity' and 'so far as pertains unto the People of God, also in the sanctity of the Sacrament'.<sup>161</sup> Owing to the nature of contemporary attacks upon the institution Augustine does not undertake a thorough analysis of either good. The former, like 'the procreation of children', is required by 'the marriage compact' and its violation is adultery.<sup>162</sup> The objective manner in which it tends to be conceived is made especially clear when Augustine considers the faith which may be present in an adulterous relationship. This faith too can be violated, but he thinks that it would be 'strange' if the adulterer should regard his partner's return 'to marriage chastity' as a breach of faith.<sup>163</sup> This surprisingly mild remark cannot be explained by reference to the fact that Augustine is here treating an aspect of 'the good of marriage' which is found 'throughout all nations',<sup>164</sup> as if that required him to operate with a less stringent concept of marital faithfulness. For, just as the

160. Conf., VIII, xii, 30.

161. De Bono Conjug., xxiv, 32.

162. Ibid, iv, 4; De Mor. Man., xviii, 65, cf. C. Faust. Man., xv, 7. In other words, these two elements in marriage possess legal status which is acknowledged by all who enter it.

163. De Bono Conjug., iv, 4.

164. Ibid, xxiv, 32.

Christian point of view informs his discussion of the value of procreation, so it does here. Thus, the element of moderation in his treatment of adultery occurs in spite of, not in place of, an unequivocal condemnation of infidelity and a strong demand for 'a return to true and lawful faith',<sup>165</sup> which presuppose the Christian view that only death can dissolve the marriage-bond.<sup>166</sup> His conciliatory approach to the adulterer should therefore be taken as further evidence of his appreciation of the personal qualities in any relationship. We may also suspect that his own experience of marriage-planning made him more wary than most of his fellow-Christians who, to this day, tend to assume that those who are marrying for the first time are always 'joined together' by God.

A further opportunity for Augustine to show concern for the quality of the marital relationship arises from the apostolic statement that it involves delivering power over one's own body to one's partner.<sup>167</sup> He notes that 'while in all other social matters the wife ought to obey her husband, in this one matter of their bodily connection as man and wife, their power over one another is mutual.'<sup>168</sup> Therefore, abstention from sexual activity, however valuable the purpose to which it may be put, cannot be legitimate unless both partners desire it.<sup>169</sup> Of course, this demand for protection against spiritual fanaticism is motivated by

165. Ibid, iv, 4.

166. Ibid, vii, 6 - viii, 7. This discussion, which develops out of his account of marital fidelity, concludes with a specific reference to the failure of 'the laws of the Gentiles' to recognize that 'the marriage compact' is indissoluble, except by death.

167. I Corinthians, 7:4.

168. C. Faust. Man., xii, 31.

169. De Beno Conjug, vi, 6.



a deep fear that, without it, the weaker partner may lapse into incontinence and adultery.<sup>170</sup> Thus Augustine is forced to admit that his effort to restrict the place of sexual intercourse within marriage itself has limits.

The treatise on marriage makes no explicit reference to the passage in Ephesians from which the sacramental view of the institution ultimately derives.<sup>171</sup> Augustine merely assumes that in marriage 'a certain sacrament of some greater matter' is taken from 'this weak mortal state of man'. Further, he only uses this little-developed, yet clearly well-known, view to highlight the indissolubility of marriage.<sup>172</sup> He also points out that 'the Divine Rule seems to prescribe' this.<sup>173</sup> The permanence of the marriage-bond, which again proves that it is not 'for the sake of begetting children', cannot be impaired by divorce or remarriage, against both of which it stands, therefore, as 'a rebuke'.<sup>174</sup> Despite this criticism of 'the laws of the Gentiles', however, there is no suggestion that their marriages are invalid.<sup>175</sup> When we consider the manner in which the Christian perspective has influenced his whole account of 'the good of marriage' this is most surprising. It serves to demonstrate how much the church's concern for its own identity, which involved preoccupation with such 'spiritual' values as absolute continence,

170. Ibid. The reference to the 'temptation of Satan' shows that Augustine has I Corinthians 7:5 in mind.

171. As has frequently been pointed out, this view of marriage was, in large part, prompted by the use of the Latin term *sacramentum* to translate the Greek *μυστήριον*, which appears in the original text of Ephesians 5:32. v. e.g. H. Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, (trans. by J. Doberstein), James Clarke & Co., London, 1964, pp. 125ff.

172. De Bono Conjug., vii, 6f.: xxiv, 32.

173. Ibid, vii, 7. His hesitancy will be due to the famous Matthean 'exception - clause' (Matthew 5: 32; 19:9).

174. De Bono Conjug., vii, 7-viii, 7.

175. Ibid, xviii, 21 states categorically, however, that marriage which follows a divorce can never be 'lawful'.

retarded concern for its relations with wider society, which would have required the development of a consistent view of marriage.

During his treatise on marriage, Augustine rarely loses an opportunity to point out that the 'angelic' path of virginity is 'better'.<sup>176</sup> That he should have felt bound to produce a companion-work on virginity is itself significant. To it he brings a warm enthusiasm which, though it fails to reproduce the ecstatic language of Ambrose, further emphasizes the detached character of the former treatise. Much of what he says is conventional. Virginity is 'the portion of Angels, and the practice, in corruptible flesh, of perpetual incorruption' beside which marriage appears as a mere remedy for incontinence and its goods as 'offices of human duty'.<sup>177</sup> For virginity goes beyond the commandments to the counsels of God.<sup>178</sup> Hence, the virgins devote themselves more fully to God<sup>179</sup> and thus 'follow' and 'imitate' Christ more closely.<sup>180</sup>

Augustine's zeal, however, never borders on fanaticism and he is careful to dissociate himself from some of the views expressed by Jerome. The birth of virgins is due, not to marriage, but to nature and, anyway, these are not true dedicated virgins.<sup>181</sup> In rejecting these views, he could have left himself open to criticism that he was covertly approving

176. e.g. *De Bono Conjug.*, viii, 8; ix, 9; xi, 13; xxiii, 28; xxvi, 35.

177. *De Sancta Virg.*, xii, 12 - xiii, 12; xxi, 21.

178. *Ibid.*, xiv, 14 - xv, 15.

179. *Ibid.*, xxii, 22; xxxviii, 39.

180. *Ibid.*, xxvii, 27 - xxix, 29.

181. *Ibid.*, x, 10.

some of the claims of Jerome's apponents. This explains why he spends an inordinate amount of time rejecting the argument that apostolic authority only promises the virgin a temporal, not a heavenly, reward.<sup>182</sup> For Augustine, the view that 'all are equal' in terms of God's 'spiritual grace' means only that temporal distinctions, such as those of sex or race, count for nothing before God.<sup>183</sup> However, 'after we have shunned or had forgiveness of sins, we must approach eternal life'<sup>184</sup> and this affords an opportunity for different levels of spiritual achievement which merit different degrees of divine reward. The virgin who overcomes 'the very root of concupiscence' and 'practising an heavenly and angelic life in an earthly mortal state',<sup>185</sup> may 'feel confident . . . that there is prepared for her a palm of greater glory than the married will receive'.

Like Ambrose, Augustine finds the model of virginity in Mary, the mother of Christ. However, his development of this idea takes the form of a eulogy of the model, instead of a depiction of her life,<sup>187</sup> and so is directed to the self-understanding of the virgin and not to her practice of the virtues appropriate to her station. The glory of Mary does not primarily consist in the virgin birth. For 'her nearness as a Mother would have been of no profit to Mary, had she not borne Christ in her heart after a more blessed manner than in her flesh.'<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless,

182. Ibid, xiii, 13 - xxvi, 26. The argument arose on the basis of I Corinthians, 7: 25f.

183. Conf., XIII, xxiii, 33.

184. De Sancta Virg., xiv, 14.

185. Ibid, xxiv, 24.

186. Ibid, xviii, 18.

187. For which source material was scarce. cf. sup. p. 47.

188. De Sancta Virg., iii, 3.

since Christ chose to be born of one who had already, freely 'dedicated her virginity to God', the virgin birth is a symbol of the divine approval of virginity and of Mary's greatness.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, it 'is the ornament of all holy virgins' who, 'together with Mary are mothers of Christ', if they follow her in 'doing the will of God'.<sup>190</sup> This emphasis on the equality of the virgins and their model shows that, although he highlights Mary's essential glory rather than the virtues which reflect it, Augustine is far from anticipating the medieval cult of the virgin.

Augustine's silence concerning the virtues which accompany Mary's virginity is matched by the brevity with which he counsels her imitator to ensure that the rest of her conduct corresponds with the virginity she has professed and kept. He merely gives a resume of the vices which are denounced in various passages in the New Testament.<sup>191</sup> His keen appreciation of the variety in human customs<sup>192</sup> will have contributed to this refusal to specify the import of virtues, such as modesty, which, because they deal with the individual's self-presentation, are greatly influenced by the culture in which they emerge. Also, by emphasizing the external or visible aspects of virtue, they maximize the danger of pride. That this was the chief reason for the brevity of Augustine's account of the virtues appropriate to virginity, can be seen from the

189. Ibid, iv, 4.

190. Ibid, v, 5.

191. Ibid, liii, 54.

192. v. e.g. Conf., III, vii, 13 - viii, 15.

exhortation to humility which he appends to the discussion.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, what replaces the traditional treatment of virginity's attendant virtues in Augustine's treatise is an extended account of the virtue of humility.<sup>194</sup>

The virgin will guard humility if she imitates the life of Christ and attends to his teaching.<sup>195</sup> Also, since she is 'the more adorned by His gifts',<sup>196</sup> she has better cause for remembering 'that by the grace of God' she is what she is. She must be careful not to 'fall into another snare of pride' which is to make 'the very grace of God' a reason for despising others.<sup>197</sup> For, although she may know that hers is the hundred-fold fruit referred to in the parable,<sup>198</sup> she cannot, for example, know 'whether this or that married woman' may not be better 'able to suffer for Christ', which would be proof of greater righteousness.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, although he hesitates to say that no-one can live without sin, because he fears that he may be judging on the basis of his own weakness,<sup>200</sup> Augustine draws the virgins' attention to those passages of Scripture which assert the continuing need for confession and reminds them that

193. De Sancta. Virg., liii, 54.

194. Ibid, xxxi, 31 - liii, 54.

195. Ibid, xxxi, 31ff, lii, 53.

196. Ibid, xl, 41.

197. Ibid, xliii, 44.

198. Ibid, xlv, 46 - xlvii, 47 (Matthew 13:1ff). Augustine spends much time puzzling over what types of virtue the different yields may, signify. He begins by referring final judgment of the issue to those 'who understand these things better than we', which suggests that he was aware that some parts of the church possessed a fixed tradition of interpretation, but that this was lacking in Africa. His problem is further heightened by the recognition that there are more than three 'gifts of Divine grace' of which 'one is greater and better than another'. Although marriage is always included in the various interpretations he offers, then, we are dealing here with Augustine's speculations alone. Hence we cannot regard his treatment of the matter as proof of Bailey's claim, which Jerome appears to refute, that the tradition had always reserved a place for marriage when interpreting the parable, cf. sup. p.58f. , note 270.

199. De Sancta Virg., xliii, f., 45.

200. Ibid, i, 51.

only the baptized pray the Lord's prayer.<sup>201</sup> Earlier he had stated that God allows their profession to include 'many, both men and women, about to fall', in order that their 'fear may be increased, whereby to repress pride'.<sup>202</sup> If this, 'the fear of punishment', reveals the self-concern, and consequent individualism, which lies at the heart of his conception of the love of God, so too does the 'chaste fear' of displeasing God which, he says, is inherent in 'perfect charity'. For he defines this higher, eternal form of fear as 'the desire of the reward'.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the arguments with which Augustine exhorts his readers to humility would, if they were fully developed, undermine the traditional view that Christian faith tends towards a specific style of life. If God's gifts are so 'hidden' as to make it impossible to know that the virgin will remain faithful to her profession or that her virtue is superior to that of a wife, then Christian identity also ceases to be outwardly demonstrable. Augustine is able to avoid this conclusion, which threatens his understanding of the nature of world-transcendence, by pointing out that humility must not be equated with anxiety.<sup>204</sup> In other words, dependence upon God's grace means no loss of confidence in his promises. Therefore, since she fulfils what Augustine conceives to

201. Ibid, xlviii, 48 - 1, 50. He refers especially to 1 John (1:8ff; 2:1f).

202. De Sancta Virg., xl, 41.

203. Ibid, xxxviii, 39. cf. J. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1938, pp. 215f., who, while admitting that the charge of self-concern applies to the less perfect form of fear, claims that the fear of displeasing God is 'disinterested'. cf. further inf.pp.155ff.

204. De Sancta Virg., liii, 54.

be the requirements of the spiritual love which grace imparts, the virgin possesses a sure Christian identity. 'See with how great security ye love Him, Whom ye fear not to offend by false suspicions'. Unlike marital love, in which neither party is fully revealed to the other, the virgin's love for God is transparently honest. Hence it leaves no room for the suspicion which is 'usually' found in the love of husband and wife.<sup>205</sup>

Set alongside his view of humility, this portrait of the virgin, with which Augustine concludes his treatise, appears to be little more than fanciful idealism. Yet, given his conception of spiritual love, it is true that, other things being equal, the state of absolute continence is the pre-eminent form of Christian existence in the world. Furthermore, although his estimation of virginity betrays an enthusiasm which over-rides consistent argument, it does conform with his previous statements in one important respect. The 'beauty' of the virgins is found 'within', in the honesty or 'fair conduct' which God has bestowed upon them. Hence, their capacity to 'bridle the flesh' is merely a sign of their inner 'power to become daughters of God'.<sup>206</sup>

While this is an adequate resolution of the problem of non-Christian forms of virginity, with which Augustine's predecessors had struggled,<sup>207</sup> it also means that there is no fundamental difference

205. Ibid, lv, 56. In accordance with this assurance of Christian identity, Augustine, at this stage of his intellectual development, saw no distinction between the church and the kingdom of heaven except that the former is merely part of what will be finally 'gathered together' in the latter. (v. De Sancta Virg., xxiv, 24).

206. De Sancta Virg., lv, 56.

207. v. sup. pp.56, 62.

between the continent and the temperate, married Christian. For, in answer to the Manichaean charge that the Christians, by their admission of marriage, 'have retained the manners of the Gentiles', Augustine points out that 'while the things are the same, the end is different: for the end we have in view is, according to the just commandment of God, love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned'.<sup>208</sup> Only his suspicion of the flesh, which leads him to elevate one possible sign of 'faith unfeigned', prevents Augustine from drawing the conclusion that grace, as it disperses Christians to varying styles of life, provides a sufficient basis for their identity and so demands a reformulation of the ethical task.

Behind Augustine's treatment of humility and the problems which it raises for an ethic of Christian identity, lies his growing appreciation of the power of evil in human life. His analysis of the character of evil hardly touched this problem but, in the Confessions we find him investigating the origin of evil,<sup>209</sup> which, if it were discovered, would explain both how evil had entered into God's perfectly ordered creation and how it had enslaved a creature whose possession of a rational soul, the very image of God, showed that he had been made to participate in the life of God. Faced with this problem of the deep-rooted presence of evil in man, Augustine began to stress God's grace as the only sufficient remedy. However, the treatises on marriage and

208. C. Faust. Mon., xx, 23.

209. v. sup. pp.90-94.



virginity, written shortly after the Confessions, reveal how little Augustine had integrated this new element with the rest of his thought. Only the exhortation to humility, in the latter work, refers to grace as the foundation of the Christian life and, even here, there is room for the more traditional argument from the example and teaching of Christ.

It is just possible that, if circumstances had not made it necessary to focus attention upon the origin of evil, Augustine may have rested content with the view that this is a great mystery. Certainly, his concern with the problem went back to his pre-Manichaean days and his early theological works show that he had not given up all hope of finding a solution. Some of the possibilities he considered contain strong hints of the answer he would give in his old age. However, he had also become convinced of the limitations of the individual human mind in its pursuit of truth and, as his treatment of the question concerning the origin of the soul makes clear, he was prepared to forgo a final solution of difficult problems. Such a peaceful outcome ceased to be possible when Pelagius, a British layman whom we may best compare with a modern revivalist preacher, began to attack Augustine's view of evil and, consequently, to challenge the manner in which the African bishop made grace the basis of Christian assurance and identity.

When Pelagius encountered the Confessions, he was greatly troubled

by Augustine's emphasis on grace.<sup>210</sup> For he recognized that, if grace alone could free the will from bondage to evil, his conception of preaching as a call for repentance and obedience to God would be deficient. In opposition to Augustine's ideas, therefore, he asserted the essential freedom of man based on the capacity of the will to choose its goal and, if necessary, to dispense with a former choice for the sake of a new one. Consequently, God's work of salvation was limited to the revelation of his will in the Law of the Old Testament and in the life and teaching of Christ where the 'drawing' power of his love also became apparent.<sup>211</sup> Pelagius considered this sufficient to provide men with the possibility of freeing themselves from the evil habits of the world into which they had been born. They could, if they chose, meet the demand for perfection specified in God's laws. Before our examination of Augustine's counter-attack raises too much sympathy for Pelagius, we should note that he combines the ascetical enthusiasm of his age with the legalistic zeal of Tertullian. It is no accident that some of his most ardent supporters were members of the Italian aristocracy whose ideal was to withdraw from the affairs of the world in order to cultivate their private spiritual gardens.<sup>212</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Pelagius held such views. Inevitably, a man in his position will be more conscious of the successes than of the

210. v. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 177; cf. pp. 340-352 for an excellent summary of the views of Pelagius and his followers. Our resume of Pelagius' ideas is based chiefly on Augustine's depiction of them since it is his reaction which primarily concerns us.

211. cf. e.g. *De Gratia Christi et de Peccato Originali*, I, xxvii-xlv.

212. v. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 341 f.

failures which follow from preaching. Augustine's situation was entirely different. During his time as bishop of Hippo he had to deal, not only with intransigent opposition from Manichees and Donatists, but with a congregation whose undoubted virtues could not hide their stubborn resistance to his appeals for a rejection of sinful customs and habits.<sup>213</sup> Such an experience, magnified as the weeks of preaching grew into years, could only heighten his conviction that the reformation of man required something beyond his own capacities.

In answer to Pelagius, then, Augustine reasserts his anthropology. The will is not the autonomous principle of human self-determination, but 'an intermediate power' which, as it directs the life of man, also reflects the influence of its object, desire for which is its principle of movement.<sup>214</sup> Hence man's estrangement from God involves far more than an unchosen participation in the evil habits of the world from which, upon hearing the commandments of God, he is capable of extricating himself. The act of sin may not be divorced from the state of mind which leads to it. Behind the act lies 'dishonest desire', which 'is the vitiated condition or quality by which the soul becomes evilly affected, even when it does nothing in immediate gratification of its avaricious principle, - even when it hears the prohibition "Thou shalt not covet", and censures its own covetousness, and yet retains

213. v. Ibid, pp. 247 ff.

214. v. e.g. De Spiritu et Littera, lviii.

its evil affection still'.<sup>215</sup> Far from encouraging man to pursue the path of righteousness, the law, by its prohibition, incites him to sin.<sup>216</sup> Thus, its essential role is to reveal man's 'vitiating condition', and, in so doing, to direct him towards grace.<sup>217</sup> Pelagius' conception of grace as 'the additional knowledge which the Spirit reveals to us through the doctrine (of Christ)',<sup>218</sup> is, therefore, totally inadequate.

The soul's healthy condition consists in knowledge and charity or desire for the good. Augustine states that 'both are gifts of God' and criticizes Pelagius for placing love, which is the 'greater' of the two, under the control of the will.<sup>219</sup> For the law can only teach man what ought to be loved; it cannot inspire him to love.<sup>220</sup> This only occurs when a man has undergone the 'cure' of grace whereby God in Christ 'spiritually heals the sick or raises the dead, that is, justifies the ungodly'.<sup>221</sup> Although this process of enlightenment and awakened desire can be described as the result of God's instruction and love,<sup>222</sup> its mysterious character is also apparent. For, although his statement that God 'acts upon the reasonable soul, and induces it to believe in Him' need only imply the influence of a 'desirable object' upon the will, the fact that not all men respond to God's initiative remains a problem.

215. De Perfectione Justitiae Hominis ii.

216. Ibid, vi.

217. De Grat. Christ. et De Pecc. Orig., I, ix f..

218. Ibid., I, xlv.

219. Ibid, I, xxvii.

220. Ibid, I, xiv.

221. De Natura et Gratia, xxix.

222. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., I, xiv f.; cf. De Spir. et Litt., lxiv.

At first, Augustine was inclined to solve it by referring to the responsibility of the individual who remains free to yield or withhold consent. However, this would both dissolve the element of mysterious power in grace and, under certain conditions at least, endow the will with an autonomy not unlike that suggested by Pelagius. Therefore, we are not surprised when he concludes this argument with the ambiguous statement that one person 'is so far advised as to be persuaded', whereas another is not.<sup>223</sup> Later, after many years of controversy with the Pelagians, he will emphasize the mystery of grace by asserting the doctrine of predestination according to which God 'operates . . . without us, in order that we may become willing'.<sup>224</sup>

Only the man who finds in God both 'a doctor' and 'a helper' is truly free.<sup>225</sup> Through the love of God which grace imparts to the will man receives the power to 'fulfil the law, not as constituted under the law, nor indeed as wanting the law'.<sup>226</sup> The will of the non-Christian is only free in the sense that it remains the vital principle of his activity.<sup>227</sup> Even if it should lead him to keep the law, its motive will be inadequate.

223. De Spir. et. Litt., lx.

224. De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio xxxiii; cf., xii.

225. De Spir. et. Litt., ix. Gilson, therefore, is exaggerating God's role as a 'helper' at the expense of his role as a 'doctor' when he claims that, for Augustine, 'it would be a mistake to think that the predominant delight abolishes free choice', (op. cit. p. 162) He fails to realize that when God, as he puts it, works 'triumphantly on the will', the terms of free choice are superceded. According to Augustine's psychology of the will, this does not mean that its integrity is violated. However, it is one thing to state that the voluntary capacity of the will remains intact, another to claim that it is fully operative when God's grace moves it.

226. De Spir. et Litt., xv.

227. v. De Anim. et Rjus. Orig., II, ii.

The fear of the Jew or of the natural man and the desire to please others<sup>228</sup> are far removed from faith which "works by love",<sup>229</sup> and has, as its final reward, 'the most blessed contemplation of God Himself', 'a blessing for the understanding to appreciate'.<sup>230</sup>

From our distant perspective in time it might well seem that Augustine has done enough to meet the challenge of Pelagius. For, although his elaboration of the concept of grace raises its own problems, notably, those relating to the doctrine of predestination, it certainly deals with the omni-presence of evil far more honestly<sup>231</sup> and so gives the lie to any optimistic demand for perfection. It was, however, impossible for Augustine to consider this a sufficient response to Pelagian claims. First of all, the battle was too protracted. When Pelagius retired from the scene, others, such as Caelestius and Julian of Eclanum, were ready to pursue his cause. Augustine even had to deal with some of the growing communities of monks who feared that his increased emphasis upon the role of grace would sap enthusiasm for the performance of meritorious works.<sup>232</sup> More important than the dimensions of the controversy, though, was the depth of Pelagius' challenge itself. By challenging Augustine's conception of grace it threatened to undermine all that he believed to be necessary for the life of faith. Thus,

228. De Spir. et Litt., xiii; De Nat. et Grat. lxvii, De Nup. et Conc; I, iv.

229. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., I, xxvi (quoting Galatians 5:6)

230. De Spir. et Litt., xxxix; xxxvi.

231. cf. P. Brown, op. cit., esp. pp. 366, 393ff.

232. v. Ibid, pp. 398 ff.. cf. Epistles 214 and 215 to Valentinus, the abbot of Hadrumetum and the treatises De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio and De Correptione et Gratia.

the Pelagians' attack upon his view of grace implies opposition to 'the inspired Scripture',<sup>233</sup> however much they may claim to respect its authority. Moreover, their elevation of the powers of the individual in face of the revealed law undermines the teaching authority of the church as well as the need for its sacraments.

Confronted with such total opposition, Augustine was inevitably moved to develop his ideas concerning the origin and power of evil. The sacrament of baptism proves that infants need to be freed from 'sins which they have contracted by their very birth, owing to the taint and flaw of their nature',<sup>234</sup> The words of David in Psalm 51:5, where there is 'no reference to fornication', do likewise.<sup>235</sup> From the view that men are born into a state of subjection to evil<sup>236</sup> it is but a short, though not logically necessary, step to claim that this is due to something in the process of birth. When we recall Augustine's neo-Platonic ideas, which are but one aspect of his deep sympathy with the church's traditional suspicion of sexuality and its increasingly ascetic temper, it becomes apparent that he could scarcely avoid making this inference.

What, then, specifically signifies the presence of evil in the

233. cf. *De Grat. et Lib., Arb.*, xli.

234. *De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig.*, II, xvii.

235. *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione*, I, xxxiv.

236. For Augustine, as we have seen, man under the Law is in total bondage to sin. However, this subjection does not involve 'total depravity' since the capacities of the mind, the image of God, have not been wholly obliterated (*De Spir. et Litt.*, xlviii) For the purposes of society, then, man's natural powers remain adequate (*De Nat. et Grat.*, lxxiii). Thus man's depravity can only be regarded as 'total' in the sense that, apart from grace, he is utterly incapable of ever fulfilling God's will.

procreative process? It cannot be 'the fleshly substance' or anything in it, for this would mean, as Porphyry asserted, that not everything in creation was good.<sup>237</sup> Semen, for example, cannot be the bearer of sin.<sup>238</sup> Sin must be found in the soul as well as the body, for each 'requires the help of a Saviour and Redeemer'.<sup>239</sup> Hence, it consists in 'carnal concupiscence', a 'vitiating affection' which manifests itself in 'the lust of the flesh'.<sup>240</sup> For this to be an effective cause of man's subjection to evil, that is, if it is to guarantee that all who are born share the same state, its presence cannot be accidental; it must be necessary. The will of God establishes this necessity. For 'by a just punishment the disobedience of the members was the retribution to the disobedience of the first man'.<sup>241</sup> In other words, as a result of the sin of Adam, man lost 'that obedience of his body' which was 'so remarkably displayed in his Lord'.<sup>242</sup> Since Christ, by his birth, escaped the influence of 'that carnal concupiscence which involves man who is born therefrom in original sin',<sup>243</sup> this 'display' of continence is hardly 'remarkable'. It is merely the achievement of what had been reasonably expected from Adam.<sup>244</sup>

237. De Civ. Dei, X, xxiv. Porphyry was the successor of Plotinus and his systematizer. Together, they were the two chief authorities of the neo-Platonists.

238. v. e.g. De Nupt. et Conc., II, xxvi.

239. e.g. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss. II, lix.

240. Ibid, I, x; De Nupt. et Conc., II, lix; De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig. II, xlii; cf. e.g. De Perf. Just. Hom., vi.

241. Contra Dues Epistolas Pelagianorum, I, xxxi; cf. e.g. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., II, xxxvi; De Nupt. et Conc., II, xxii.

242. De Nat. et Grat., xxviii.

243. De Nupt. et Conc., I, i; II, xiv.; cf. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., I, lvi.

244. De Civ. Dei, XIV, xv.



However, it gives Augustine an opportunity to castigate the Pelagians for making 'the flesh of those to be redeemed equal to the flesh of the Redeemer'.<sup>245</sup>

This attempt to rally support for his cause by evoking the deep emotions of piety reveals the lengths to which Augustine was prepared to go in order to overcome the Pelagian threat. So too does his appeal to shame for, while it is no doubt impossible to attempt to plumb the depths of evil without raising men's subconscious fears, it is another thing to do so deliberately.<sup>246</sup> Augustine contributes to the growing alliance of shame with guilt and sexuality by referring to the privacy which even the married seek for the act of sexual intercourse.<sup>247</sup> This he regards as sufficient proof that 'the libidinous motion of the organs of generation'<sup>248</sup> and other 'inordinate and indecorous gestures'<sup>249</sup> reflect the sinfulness of 'an overbearing concupiscence'.<sup>250</sup> Of course, he felt that this employment of the feeling of shame was justified by Genesis' account of the effects of the Fall.<sup>251</sup>

Augustine has come a long way from his affirmations, regarding the patriarchs at least, that love-play can be proper and that sexual intercourse, when reduced by temperance to its 'natural' use, 'cannot be

245. C. Duas Ep. Pel. II, iii; cf. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., II, xxxviii; De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xxxiii.

246. cf. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 388ff.

247. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xlii; De Nupt. et Conc., I, xxvii; C. Duas Ep. Pel., II, xxxiii.

248. De Nupt. et Conc., II, liii.

249. Ibid, I, ix.

250. Ibid, I, xvi.

251. Ibid, I, vi. (referring to Genesis 2:25, cf. 4:21).

lust'.<sup>252</sup> (One of the few things which may be said in favour of his account of the transmission of original sin is that it is less unrealistic than his earlier description of the patriarchs' sexual intercourse). Since, if lust were absent from any act of sexual intercourse, the transmission of original sin might fail, the Pauline 'concession' is transformed from a sign that concupiscence usually accompanies the marriages of the faithful to the proof that it always does.<sup>253</sup> Further support for this claim is provided by analogies drawn from the realm of nature. The cultivated olive bears only a wild tree which must, in turn, be cultivated;<sup>254</sup> children may inherit diseases from their parents.<sup>255</sup> Such arguments were also intended to counter Pelagian charges that Augustine's God, by subjecting man to sin, displayed inequity. This claim was hardly calculated to impress someone who had long since pointed out that man's idea of justice could not be made the basis for comprehending the inscrutable ways of God.<sup>256</sup> It was rather directed towards those 'aristocratic' minds, imbued with 'Roman' conceptions of justice, to whom the ideas of Pelagius made their chief appeal.<sup>257</sup> Certainly, this concept of equity ignores the question of man's solidarity in sin and is somewhat indicative of the

252. Notably, the latter statement, in *De Bono Conjug.*, xvi, 18, is explained away in *Retract.*, II, xxii, 2.

253. *De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig.*, II, xliii (referring to I Corinthians 7:5).

254. *De Nupt. et Conc.*, I, xxi.

255. *Ibid.*, II, lvii.

256. *cf. Conf.*, III, viii, 15.

257. v. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 387 ff..

decline ~~in~~ social responsibility which was evident in these circles.

Once transmitted through 'carnal generation',<sup>258</sup> original sin has two effects upon the life of man. It subjects him to ignorance and difficulty, that is, to error as he seeks the truth and to lust which prevents him from fulfilling the requirements of truth.<sup>259</sup> However, although man's reasoning as well as his capacity for rational action is affected, Augustine maintains his neo-Platonic preference for the pure spirituality of the former by claiming that it is less badly stricken. Whereas original sin has made the mind weak 'in comparison of that last stage of complete perfection', it remains 'very strong, in contrast with the lower faculties of the flesh and our "natural man", which as yet "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God"'.<sup>260</sup> Hence the character of original sin is virtually identified with the means of its transmission. It consists in 'the penalty of man's finding his own members emulating against himself that very disobedience which he had practised against God'.<sup>261</sup> By making this penalty the source of the mind's present weakness, Augustine is able to avoid the view that original sin has exerted a direct influence upon the soul or caused any inherent disease within it. Thus he claims that the human condition is determined by the fact that 'the soul is oppressed by the

258. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xxxvii; De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss. I, xv.

259. De Nat. et Grat. lxxxix.

260. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., I, xiii, (quoting I Corinthians 2:14).

261. Ibid., II, xxxix.

body'.<sup>262</sup>

Away from the context of the Pelagian controversy, where he could think more calmly, Augustine continued to uphold his broad definition of evil as love which, 'against nature's order', prefers 'the lower' natures, which themselves are good, to the higher. Since 'sweet beauteous bodies' are not the only form of 'lower' good, it follows that lust is not the only way in which concupiscence manifests itself. It may, for example, take the form of covetousness.<sup>263</sup> Indeed, in his treatise on widowhood, Augustine keenly observes that 'looking into man's conversation, we have often found by experience, that in certain persons, when wantonness hath been restrained, avarice hath increased'.<sup>264</sup> Elsewhere he further broadens the concept of concupiscence by recognizing that, since some created natures are spiritual, notably the soul, not all 'enticements unto sin' arise from 'the corruptible flesh'.<sup>265</sup> Thus there is a concupiscence of the spirit whereby the soul, 'perversely loving' its own power, 'craves wisdom'.<sup>266</sup> Pride, then, is unique among sins in that it testifies to the continuing strength of man's mind rather than to his weakness.<sup>267</sup>

Against the neo-Platonists Augustine points out that Paul's use of

262. De Perf. Just. Hom., vi.; De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., I, lxxix.

263. De Civ. Dei, XII, viii.

264. De Bono Viduitatis ad Julianam, xxi, 26.

265. De Civ. Dei, XIV, iii.

266. Ibid, XII, viii; De Nupt. et Conc., II, lii.

267. De Nat. et Grat., xxxi.

the term 'flesh' provides no support for their views. When 'the apostle' includes 'mental' as well as 'corporal' vices among 'the works of the flesh' he shows that 'he takes flesh for man, as the part for the whole (?)'. Hence, to live 'according to the flesh' means to 'live according to man', that is, 'according to the body or the soul, or both', instead of 'according to God'.<sup>268</sup> In his heated discussion of original sin, Augustine chose to forget all this. Reference is made to Romans 7 in order to prove that flesh is 'the dwelling-place of sin'.<sup>269</sup> Thus, in place of Paul's agonized discussion of man's divided loyalties, we find that man himself is divided into a higher and a lower self.<sup>270</sup> Moreover, since the man who gives way to lust cannot say 'I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate', the passage must apply chiefly to believers.<sup>271</sup> For it is they who accept the obligation to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts,<sup>272</sup> that is, to 'bridle and restrain' the rage of concupiscence which appears primarily in the realm of sexuality.<sup>273</sup>

A new emphasis upon duty becomes apparent here. It is the product of Augustine's denial that the body has any share in grace. Instead,

268. De Civ., Dei, XIV, ii - v.

269. De Perf. Just. Hom., xi.

270. J. Burnaby's suggestion that Augustine located the penalty of sin (*poena peccati*) in concupiscence primarily because of Romans 7 (op. cit., p. 191) is exaggerated. Later, however, Burnaby admits the influence of other factors, notably Platonism and Roman law (pp. 211f.)

271. De Nupt. et Conc., I, xxxi 2.; Romans 7:18.

272. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., II, xxxvii; cf. De Perf. Just. Hom., xxi.

273. De Nupt. et Conc., I, ix.

the flesh remains subject to corruption and death and so out of harmony with the spirit of man, which is already being renewed.<sup>274</sup> Christ could have abolished temporal death but, Augustine states, this would add 'a certain felicity to the flesh' at the expense of 'the fortitude of faith' which seeks to overcome the rebellion of the bodily members.<sup>275</sup> Here Augustine establishes a dichotomy between the soul and the body which not only contradicts the view, expressed elsewhere in his works, that man's spirit cannot be sanctified apart from the body,<sup>276</sup> but accepts the neo-Platonic diagnosis of man's existential condition. By postponing the renewal of the body until the resurrection, when it will 'consist of an absolutely perfect newness of condition',<sup>277</sup> Augustine is able to oppose the neo-Platonic idea that man's perfection consists in a state of spiritual disembodiment without having to sacrifice the attitude to the temporal body implied in this idea.

As we have already seen, however, the body continues to influence the soul. Man's 'deliverance' from evil 'is not fully wrought, so long as the soul is oppressed by the body, which is hastening to corruption'.<sup>278</sup> It is therefore impossible for any man to know and love God fully during this temporal life. When they refer to the love

274. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., II, ix; cf. De Perf. Just. Hom., vi.

275. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., II, 1.

276. v. e.g. De Bono Vid., vi, 8.

277. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., II, ix.

278. De Perf. Just. Hom., vi.; cf. De Nat. et Grat., lxviii, where the possibility of sinlessness is allowed, though largely as a merely logical consequence of the believer's capacity for spiritual progress.

which accompanies the vision of the Good, then, the neo-Platonists fail to provide an adequate basis for a life of righteousness. Since he has yet to attain the eternal vision of God and the perfect righteousness which it entails, man must live by faith whose righteousness involves obedience to the commandments whereby God directs his course as well as desire for happiness or incomplete love of God.<sup>279</sup> Although he can still claim that the Christian's love for God removes the burden from the law,<sup>280</sup> then, it is clearly Augustine's considered judgment that, under the conditions of temporal existence, desire and duty together form the foundation of virtue. It is one thing, he says, to lack the fulness of love, another 'to be swayed by no lust'.<sup>281</sup> Behind the more prominent role which Augustine now assigns to duty we may discern the influence of the African church, with its simple, and traditional, emphasis upon the law of God.<sup>282</sup>

Although his account of concupiscence may explain the nature of sin's rule over man, Augustine has still to explain how evil could enter into the divinely ordered cosmos. Original sin is the penalty which followed from Adam's disobedience to God, a 'most righteous retribution . . rendered us by our disobedient members'.<sup>283</sup> However, Augustine's notion

279. De Perf. Just. Hom., viii; De Spir. et Litt., lxxv.

280. v. e.g. De Nat. et Grat., lxxxiii; De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., I, xiv.

281. De Spir. et Litt., lxxv.

282. A church which, it should be remembered, had already produced a Tertullian and a Cyprian.

283. De Nupt. et Conc., II, xxii; cf. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., II, xxxvi; C. Duas. Ep. Pel., I, xxxi.

of man's solidarity in Adam, which had been developed prior to the outbreak of the Pelagian controversy,<sup>284</sup> enables him to avoid the charge that it is inequitable for some individuals to suffer through the fault of another. Since Adam's life contained '(in itself as a germ) whatsoever was (developed) in his future offspring',<sup>285</sup> the penalty which later generations undergo is the sign of their participation in Adam's act of disobedience. Hence Augustine can say that the body 'has been vitiated by man's own will'.<sup>286</sup> For that first sin arose from the disobedience of the will.

Behind the evil will of our first parents, says Augustine, lies pride, which 'is the beginning of all sin (?)'. Pride occurs when the soul 'so loves itself, that it will abandon that unchangeable Good which ought to be more delightful to it than itself'. This 'voluntary' defect of the will led Eve to believe the devil when he cunningly began his work by tempting 'the meaner part of mankind'. Adam only sinned from his 'social love to her', although this also reflects an evil will and pride in face of God. Thus the devil did not seduce mankind because 'evil will and self-love had got place in them' before he confronted them.<sup>287</sup>

Just as original sin involves a prior act of will, so it determines

284. v. sup. pp. 102f..

285. De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss., III, xiv.

286. De Perf. Just. Hom., vi.

287. De Civ., Dei, XIV, xi, xiii. In the former chapter Augustine states that Eve was seduced by the devil, but that Adam was not.



the character of the will's future actions. In other words, it forms the necessitating ground of further acts of sin, or, as Augustine puts it in an almost lyrical passage, it is the plague, mark, temptation and very fuel of sin.<sup>288</sup> However, this implies no diminution of the will's intrinsic freedom. For the will is but 'an intermediate power' which, like a pendulum, requires a 'weight' in order to be set in motion, and the pressure brought upon it by the body's 'carnal lusts',<sup>289</sup> like the influence of grace, is not an imposition of external force but an appropriate formative element. Moreover, as a result of such external influences as the law or social estimation, the will remains free to refrain from acting according to its 'vitiating desires'.<sup>290</sup> Although 'for nature', that is, for the purposes of society, mere avoidance of the work of sin 'is sufficient', however, the character of the will's basic incentive is still reflected here. For it is 'one thing not to have sin, and another to refuse obedience to its desires'.<sup>291</sup>

As this last statement indicates, the concupiscence which man inherits at birth is really sin. Certainly, Augustine retains his view that sin originates in the will and endeavours to show that concupiscence is both an effect and a cause of evil will and its acts.<sup>292</sup> From this

288. De Nupt. et Conc., II, xxii.

289. De Nat. et Grat., lxii.

290. Ibid, lxvii.; De Nupt. et Conc., I, iv; De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xlv.

291. Ibid, lxxiii.

292. v. e.g. De Nupt. et Conc., I, xxv; II, xxii.

it has been inferred that Augustine identifies original sin with the disobedient will which all men share 'in Adam' and that he views concupiscence as original sin only in the sense that it is the continuing effect of that disobedience.<sup>293</sup> This argument fails to appreciate that, since concupiscence itself inheres in the will, it deserves to be judged as sin as much as any evil will or act which it may presuppose or to which it may lead.<sup>294</sup> When Augustine refers to Romans 1: 24 ff. as proof that God punishes sin by sin, he is not indulging in mere rhetoric.<sup>295</sup> Rather is he distinguishing between Adam's act of disobedience (the original sin) and concupiscence (original sin) which is not only the consequence of Adam's sin, but the means by which we necessarily share in its guilt.

Augustine's account of the successive stages in evil's progress to power over man represents a supreme effort to match his formal analysis of evil's 'place' in the created order, which, since evil is essentially non-being, is ultimately 'no place', with an existential explanation of its presence in human affairs. In so far as he succeeds he loses sight of the radical character of evil, for evil is demonic and so ultimately defies a rational explanation. When no room is left for the mysterious nature of evil's power, the presence of

293. E. Gilson, op. cit., p. 151.

294. Only of the 'regenerate', who have received God's forgiveness, then, does Augustine say that concupiscence 'is not actually sin' (De Nupt. et Conc., I, xxv, cf. II, xv).

295. De Nat. et Grat., xxiv.

evil itself finally becomes incomprehensible. If Adam and Eve did not possess an autonomy such as Pelagius assumed, how could Augustine suggest that they turned away from 'that higher and stronger Good' which gave them 'light to see it and zeal to love it' before the devil entered the scene?<sup>296</sup> However, Augustine himself was not absolutely sure of this account of the origin of evil because, elsewhere, he continued to refer to sin as 'the work of the devil'.<sup>297</sup> Here the mysterious element in the power of evil reappears as a proper counterpart to his view of grace as a power which defies total explanation. Nevertheless, his recognition of the mysterious dimension of evil is more tacit than open and it never challenges his confident description of the manner in which evil now operates in the temporal realm.

By specifying sexual desire<sup>298</sup> as the means whereby original sin is transmitted and as the primary manifestation of that concupiscence in which original sin essentially consists, Augustine virtually identifies the principle of sin with 'a certain quality' of human existence.<sup>299</sup> Instead of being a factor which underlies the whole of existence and, therefore, exercises its influence upon all of man's varied activities,

296. De Civ. Dei, XIV, xiii.

297. De Nupt. et Conc., I, i; cf. Ibid, II, xi, De Grat. Christ. de Pecc. Orig., II, xlii.

298. That is, 'overbearing concupiscence' (De Cupt. et Conc., I, xvi) which is what sexual desire is existentially (since the Fall) but not what it is essentially for Augustine. Unless one is prepared to admit the legitimacy of the rational terms by which he qualifies the proper role of the sexual impulse, however, one would have to say that Augustine's account of original sin makes sexual desire essentially sinful.

299. De Nupt. et Conc., II, liv.

as Augustine's recognition of different forms of concupiscence would seem to imply, evil becomes the attribute of a particular set of existential phenomena, notable among which is sexual activity. Thus reality is divided into two parts of which one, the sphere of mind, is qualified as good or spiritual, and the other, the sphere of body and of sexuality, is qualified as evil. By opposing bodily to spiritual existence and demanding that the manifestations of the former, especially the sexual, be suppressed, Christianity may legitimately be accused of introducing the spiritual power or genius of sensuousness into the world.<sup>300</sup> For, when one element of finite reality makes an exclusive claim to ultimate value, those elements which are specifically rejected will inevitably reassert themselves.<sup>301</sup> Since time must elapse before the opposition of principles becomes fully apparent, Don Juan, who is 'flesh incarnate, or the inspiration of the flesh by the spirit of the flesh' and may, therefore, be regarded as the representative of the principle of the flesh, belongs essentially to the later Middle Ages.<sup>302</sup> Through his doctrine of original sin, then, Augustine achieves the dubious distinction of providing a firm doctrinal basis for a principle which is implicit throughout patristic theological ethics. Thus, he

300. v. S. Kierkegaard, op. cit., vol. I, 'The Immediate Stages Of The Erotic Or The Musical Erotic', pp. 59ff. That Platonism did not have this effect is due, not just to its more limited appeal and influence, but especially to its lack of emphasis upon duty. It called upon man to 'ascend' through love, not to 'suppress' for the sake of love.

301. v. P. Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, James Nisbet & Co., 1964, e.g. p. 109.

302. S. Kierkegaard, op. cit., pp. 87 f.

plays a major role in developing the view, which became a distinctive feature of Western culture, that evil possesses a fundamentally sexual character.

In A.D. 418, the Emperor proscribed the Pelagians, thus making certain that the pope would condemn their teaching.<sup>303</sup> Thereafter, Augustine's chief adversary was to be Julian, bishop of Ecclanum, who retired to the East. One of Julian's main lines of attack was to draw attention to the effect which Augustine's view of original sin had upon the church's estimation of sexual desire and marriage. How could these continue to be regarded as good when each was instrumental in the 'propagation of a condemned original nature'?<sup>304</sup>

This charge prompted Augustine to write another treatise on marriage, De Nuptiis Et Concupiscentia, which certainly possesses a vitality lacking in his original excursion into the subject. Here and elsewhere in the so-called anti-Pelagian treatises he continues to assert the three-fold 'good' of marriage,<sup>305</sup> although the nature of the argument is such that he adds little to his former brief comments on its chastity and sacramental character. His opponents, he tells us, fail to realize that 'the good of the married life' is not 'that morbid

303. v. P. Brown, op. cit., pp. 361 f. for a discussion of this episode of the controversy.

304. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xxxvii.

305. e.g. De Nupt. et Conc., I, xiii; De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xxxix.

concupiscence with which they who know not God love their wives', but 'that conjugal chastity, by which carnal lust is reduced to the good purpose of the moderate procreation of children'.<sup>306</sup> Only the non-Christians, then, produce large families, because, whereas they 'toil at procreation, not from the desire of natural propagation of their species', but as 'mere slaves to the gratification of their lust out of very wantonness',<sup>307</sup> the faithful accept that 'sexual intercourse . . . should not be a matter of mere desire, but of necessary duty'.<sup>308</sup>

Augustine can claim, therefore, that Julian is wrong to criticize him for impugning God's created order. Essentially, the conjugal embrace is 'not only allowable, but . . . useful and honourable'.<sup>309</sup> Marriage, then, 'is itself "honourable in all" the good aspects which properly appertain to it'.<sup>310</sup> Indeed, he will now admit that 'the propagation of children to be begotten could not have taken place without sexual desire, and without intercourse of husband and wife, even in Paradise, if children were begotten there'.<sup>311</sup> However, this statement, which was undoubtedly provoked by Julian's criticisms, can only be made because of the radical divorce which Augustine establishes between the order of creation and man's existential condition. In

306. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xxxviii.

307. Ibid., II, xliii.

308. De Nupt. et Conc., I, ix.

309. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xxxix.

310. De Nupt. et Conc., I, xxvii (quoting Hebrews 13:4).

311. C. Duas Ep. Pel., I, x; cf., I, xxxi; xxxv.

Paradise the procreative members were 'at the beck of the will'.<sup>312</sup>

Now, even married Christians cannot fulfil their duty of moderate procreation for, although their sexual intercourse may be more subject to reason than that of unbelievers, they still suffer from the pressure of 'this body of death' which makes the connubial embrace impossible 'without a certain amount of bestial motion' and so guarantees the transmission of original sin to all of mankind.<sup>313</sup> Thus, if Julian will not admit 'that lust is a vitiated condition', he should at least 'allow that through the disobedience of the man and woman in the happy state the very concupiscence of their flesh was vitiated'.<sup>314</sup>

For Augustine, the feeling of shame which accompanies the act of sexual intercourse, even when it is performed by modest married people, is a sure sign that excessive sexual desire is always involved in that act. The same motive and reason are operative, he claims, when a man seeks privacy in order to have sexual intercourse with his wife. However, he shows that he is aware of the limits of such a psychological or naturalistic argument, when he claims that 'this kind of shame' is not only 'born with every man' but 'in some measure is commanded by the very laws of nature'.<sup>315</sup> Those who fail to experience it are, therefore,

312. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xl; cf. C. Duas Ep. Pel. I, xxxii; xxxv.

313. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xliii. His concern with the transmission of original sin explains why Augustine rarely refers to impotence as a sign of the body's disobedience. But cf. De Nupt. et Conc., I, vii.

314. De Nupt. et Conc., II, lix.

315. C. Duas Ep. Pel., I, xxxiii.

blameworthy. This wholly negative attitude to the role of shame in the realm of sexuality, cannot be avoided when the body is denied any intrinsic value. Instead of being the means of expressing and furthering a deep, inter-personal form of knowledge, of which shame and its quest for privacy may be a sign, the body is made the subject of reason's heteronomous demands and shame becomes a sign of its inevitable rebellion. Thus the essential purpose of the body is to call forth a purely internal struggle within the individual. Those who have wives must ensure that they 'do not submit themselves to carnal concupiscence'.<sup>316</sup> When they use their bodies in order to achieve sexual intimacy they are, according to Augustine, no more than associates in the act of procreation.<sup>317</sup>

Since the desire for children is legitimate, being 'the property of reason', Augustine allows that sexual intercourse may involve an 'honourable' form of pleasure. Although he refers to this pleasure as the 'shedding of seed',<sup>318</sup> it would be a mistake to infer that he intends to restrict it to the male and to support the notion of female sexual passivity. Elsewhere he states that, in Paradise, both Adam and Eve would have ruled their members 'by their will and pleasure' and that, since the Fall, they are alike subject to concupiscence.<sup>319</sup> His manner

316. De Nupt., et Conc., I, xv.

317. Ibid, I, v.

318. Ibid, II, xvii, xix, xxii.

319. C. Duas Ep. Pel., I, xxxii.



of describing the pleasure in the treatise on marriage and concupiscence must, therefore, be explained by reference to other factors, such as his awareness that a woman, unlike a man, may engage in sexual intercourse without feeling sexual desire,<sup>320</sup> and his conviction, which was supported by Galen and shared by most of his contemporaries, that the semen contained all the elements necessary for the growth of the child.<sup>321</sup> The rational gratification of sexual intercourse is, of course, incomplete 'unless it is followed by the true and proper fruit of marriage - conception and birth'. In this respect, it is quite different from 'the libidinous pleasure' which occurs when sexual intercourse is undertaken in order to gratify lust.<sup>322</sup>

Although 'to consent to lust for the sake of carnal pleasure alone is sin', Augustine reaffirms that 'it may be conceded to married people with pardon'.<sup>323</sup> As in his earlier treatise on marriage the basis for this view is the famous Pauline 'concession' in I Corinthians 7:5 ff.. In that treatise he had interpreted Paul's remarks as a promise that the married would be forgiven the lust which usually attends their sexual intercourse. Now, however, he regards it as proof that such forgiveness is always necessary. The 'very form of the concession',

320. De Nupt. et Conc., II, xxx.

321. Ibid, II, xxvi; De Bono Vid., xix., 24. Galen was a famous Greek physician of the second century A.D. who long remained the chief authority in medicine.

322. De Nupt. et Conc., II, xix, xxvi.

323. C. Duas Ep. Pel., I, xxxiii.

he states, 'evidently implies some degree of fault'.<sup>324</sup> Moreover, Augustine now claims that only the faithful receive this forgiveness. By directing the lustful embrace towards child-bearing the institution of marriage merely renders concupiscence venial. Only in the regenerate, whose minds are enabled to resist it, is concupiscence 'not actually sin'.<sup>325</sup> This, however, does not mean that married believers fail to transmit original sin to their children. For, while the guilt of concupiscence has been removed from them, the thing itself remains as an active ingredient in the sexual lives of Christians.<sup>326</sup>

Behind this more clearly restricted notion of forgiveness lies Augustine's view that the marriages of unbelievers are deficient in marital chastity. If they sometimes give the opposite appearance, he says, that is because it is possible to restrain some sins by means of others, for example, by the desire to impress men. Bodily chastity, like all forms of virtue, has its seat in the soul. Since their soul 'is by fornication severed from the true God', unbelievers cannot be really chaste.<sup>327</sup> No longer, then, can they be said to share in the first two aspects of the 'good' of marriage, for each of these concerns chastity. True marriage is made dependent upon faith in 'the true God'. Augustine

324. De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xliii.

325. De Nupt. et Conc., I, xxv. His interest in the personal quality of the marital relationship had already led Augustine, in the earlier treatise, towards this point of view., v. sup. pp. 109ff..

326. De Nupt. et Conc., I, xxviii f..

327. Ibid, I, v.

ceases to distinguish between the first two properties of the nuptial state and its third, or sacramental, property.<sup>328</sup> He now considers all three to be essential.

Despite his attempts to show that the sexual aspect of marriage may possess genuine delight and true chastity, the role of concupiscence is such that the procreative process which Augustine declares to be 'good' is an abstraction. He may say that the evil, 'at which even marriage blushes for shame, is not the fault of marriage, but of the lust of the flesh' or that the fruit of marriage is 'the natural creature' and not the sin which accompanies it at birth.<sup>329</sup> Nevertheless, if the faith of those who enter it alters the character of marriage, so too must the affliction of concupiscence which they pass on to their offspring. Hence we are not surprised when Augustine praises those marriages in which there is mutual consent to 'perpetual abstinence from the use of carnal concupiscence' and claims that the marital relationship is firmer when it is maintained 'by the voluntary affections of the soul' alone. His ideal of marriage, represented by Joseph and Mary who 'never even began to cohabit', is unattainable. 'The entire good . . . of the nuptial institution was effected in the case of these parents of Christ: there was offspring, there was faithfulness, there was a sacrament', that is, Jesus Christ, no adultery, no divorce.<sup>330</sup>

328. v. e.g. *De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig.*, II, xxxix.

329. *Ibid*, II, xlii.; *De Nupt. et Conc.*, II, xi.

330. *De Nupt. et Conc.*, I, xii f..

Consequently, his ultimate justification for true marriage is that it is a remedy for sin. It prevents, 'the weakness of incontinence . . . from falling into the ruin of profligacy'; and, in order that those who are married may avoid damnable sins like fornication and adultery, it provides 'concessions to an overbearing concupiscence'.<sup>331</sup>

Augustine's conception of Christian responsibility in face of concupiscence allows him to maintain the view that 'virginity is something more than conjugal chastity'.<sup>332</sup> The anti-Pelagian treatises contain little discussion of the superior forms of chastity for these were not only largely beyond the scope of the argument, but were upheld by the Pelagians, who regarded them as proof of man's capacity to achieve virtue by heroically renouncing the habits of the world. Nevertheless, some time after the outbreak of the controversy<sup>333</sup> Augustine wrote a long letter to Juliana, a noble Roman widow, which virtually complements his earlier treatises on marriage and virginity. In both its structure and content, this work is remarkably similar to the treatise on virginity. Augustine begins by establishing the superiority of the state of widowhood. Although she must remember that her chastity, like that of the married, is the gift of God<sup>334</sup> and that true virtue is a matter of 'pious humility',<sup>335</sup> the widow may

331. Ibid, I, xviii, xvi.

332. De Gestis Pelagii, xxix.

333. A.D. 414.

334. De Bono Vid., ix, 12; iiif., 4f.; cf. De Gest. Pel., xxxiii.

335. De Bono Vid., xiv, 17.

be sure that in her continence 'the excellence of a greater reward is sought for'.<sup>336</sup> By shunning the possibility of remarriage, which, though permitted, evokes 'the feeling of natural shame',<sup>337</sup> she displays 'the Christian mind, having thoughts of heavenly things'. For 'Christian doctrine' rejects marriage as something 'to be despised, unless incontinence stand in the way', and points out that 'the duty to beget sons after the flesh', enshrined in the Law of the Old Testament, has been abolished by Christ who now calls man to 'suppress and overcome' the desire for children.<sup>338</sup>

The second part of the work consists chiefly of 'exhortation'. While she possesses 'the love of a better good', the widow must 'ascribe it to the favour of God, and give Him thanks' for the love which the Spirit has 'shed abroad' in her heart.<sup>339</sup> Following a caution against the Pelagian 'error',<sup>340</sup> Augustine briefly condemns the deception of artificial adornment.<sup>341</sup> Later he returns to the subject of outward appearance, saying that this is important in so far as it prevents scandal and encourages others by which means it 'abounds also to our own profit'. Basically, though, 'a good life' is more important than 'a good report' because the former contains 'the solace of conscience and clearly also the joy, in that our reward is great in Heaven'.<sup>342</sup>

336. Ibid, ix, 12. In the Library Of Fathers edition (v. Bibliography), the Latin *muneris* is translated as 'gift' instead of 'reward'. Whichever term is preferred, it is clear that Augustine's notion of progress in grace leads to the same ambivalence as we noted in his predecessors. v. sup. pp. 12f., 46, 54f..

337. De Bono Vid., xii, 15.

338. Ibid, viii, 11.

339. Ibid, xvi, 20.

340. Ibid, xvii f., 21 f.

341. Ibid, xix, 23.

342. Ibid, xxii, 27.

Despite this assurance, however, Augustine no longer pretends, as he had done in his treatise on virginity, that a finally secure Christian identity can be achieved in this temporal life. Like the woman who has been separated from her fiancé or husband, the Christian widow must live in hope which is 'the fuel of love', kindling desire by the promise of future pleasure.<sup>343</sup> Hence Augustine concludes his letter, not by describing the glory of widowhood, but by calling upon those who have entered this vocation to 'run with perseverance', so that they may obtain the heavenly reward to which, by God's grace, they have been 'predestinated'.<sup>344</sup> By highlighting the provisional character of human estimates of virtue, then, his doctrine of grace transforms the traditional view that, in 'the Body of Christ', members are 'preferred to members', and that the 'deserts' of virgins, widows, and the married are 'distinct'.<sup>345</sup>

Of the charges we have brought against Augustine's theological ethic, none has been more sternly contested than that of individualism.<sup>346</sup> Those who would defend Augustine against this criticism<sup>347</sup> may point out that his conception of man's love for God necessarily involves social love. 'For this is the one good which has room for all to pursue it along with thee'.<sup>348</sup> Thus, 'the good in God' is not a private

343. Ibid, xxf., 25f. Despite the analogy, however, Augustine also refers to the widow's duty to 'repress' sexual desire (xx, 25).

344. De Bono Vid., xxiii, 28.

345. Ibid, vi, 8; xxiii, 28; cf. iii, 4.

346. This has been advanced with especial vigour by A. Nygren, op. cit., pp. 449-562, esp. pp. 549-555; cf. P. Lehmann, op. cit. pp. 37, 254-256; E. Brunner, op. cit. pp. 94f., 625f..

347. For example, J. Burnaby, op. cit., passim; C.N. Cochrane, op. cit. chs. XI and XII; E. Gilson, op. cit., esp. pp. 136-142, 165-184.

348. De Mor. Eccl. Cath., xxvi, 49.

love of the individual.<sup>349</sup> It implies a ministry to others, of which, as we have just seen, modesty is an example. In the city of God, where 'every one serves other in charity',<sup>350</sup> 'true concord', which was God's purpose in making mankind 'one kindred' in Adam,<sup>351</sup> is achieved. Hence Augustine regards the contemplative life as inadequate if he who undertakes it neglects 'the good of his neighbour'.<sup>352</sup> Even when the neo-Platonic character of his thought is most emphasized, then, it cannot be said that Augustine produces an ethic in which value is referred ultimately to the individual. Moreover, in so far as his conception of love for God finds a place for ministry to the welfare of others, his ethic has been informed by his appreciation of the gracious love which God bestows upon his creatures.<sup>353</sup>

Despite his appreciation of unselfish concern for the neighbour, however, Augustine invariably speaks of the 'profit' to the individual who manifests it. Such self-concern is unavoidable when the Christian life is conceived in terms of a quest for the heavenly reward. Although Augustine had learned that this life is dependent upon grace, he did not appreciate that grace removes the threat of failure and so overcomes

349. De Spir. et Litt., xlii.

350. De Civ. Dei, XIV, xxviii.

351. Ibid, XII, xxi.

352. Ibid, XIX, xix.

353. Nygren's charge of egocentricity, made in spite of his recognition that Augustine's scheme is not wholly based upon Platonic Eros, can only be regarded as an exaggeration. It has been prompted by his method of motif-research which leads him to treat the various elements in Augustine's thought in isolation. v. op. cit. pp. 532-548.

'that chaste fear' of losing one's good.<sup>354</sup> Of course, man can still fail by denying his faith in God's grace. But, as long as he makes it the basis of his life he can be free from anxiety for his own benefit. Augustine's Mediator had not drawn so near to man as to enable him to share this 'boldness and confidence' of faith.<sup>355</sup> On the contrary, he could say that Christ is 'as far distant from us as the Father'.<sup>356</sup> Since we do not yet participate in his resurrection,<sup>357</sup> we must accept that 'life on this earth is a trial on account of sin',<sup>358</sup> and that God's love lays us 'under a moral obligation' to advance in holiness which it also helps us to fulfil.<sup>359</sup> In short, we must display 'the fortitude of faith'.<sup>360</sup> Well could Augustine assure the monks, then, that his conception of grace does not undermine the freedom of the will nor lead to the view 'that in the day of judgment God will not render to every man according to his works'.<sup>361</sup> His opposition to Pelagius gave him no cause to doubt the view which was particularly strong in the African church, that man must fulfil the law of the divine judge.

This existential self-concern is heightened by Augustine's understanding of the nature of virtue. What is its work, he asks, 'but a continual fight against the inbred vices that are inherent in our own

354. cf. e.g. *De Civ. Dei.*, XIV, xix.

355. *Ephesians* 3:12.

356. *De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig.*, II, xxxiii.

357. *De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss.*, II, ix.

358. *C. Faust. Man.*, xxi, 28.

359. *De Nat. et Grat.*, xiv.

360. *De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss.*, II, 1.

361. *Ep.* 214, iii.



bosoms, not in others? Chiefly that σωφροσύνη, that temperance which suppresses the lusts of the flesh, and curbs them from carrying the mind away into mischief?<sup>362</sup> This conception of the Christian life limits concern for the neighbour not only by focussing attention upon the individual's inner or private struggle, but by devaluing the body which is a means of relating to others. The individual must transcend all earthly affections before he can enter into the 'peace' of heavenly society.<sup>363</sup> In accordance with this view Augustine states that those whose faith is immature are under no obligation to forgive the wrong which others have done to them unless their forgiveness is sought. For the Christian's basic duties consist of fasting, which indicates 'the entire subjugation of the body', almsgiving, and prayer. These, together with 'sound doctrine', provide a basis upon which 'a right faith, a firm hope, and a pure charity' may be 'built'.<sup>364</sup>

Of course, 'the pilgrim in faith' is already a member of the "celestial society" while it is here on earth' and this means that, as he seeks to obtain 'the "Heavenly City"' he refers what he does not only to God, but to his neighbour, 'because being a citizen, he must not be all for himself, but sociable in his life and actions'.<sup>365</sup> If this

362. De Civ. Dei, XIX, iv.

363. Ibid, XIX, xff., XIV, ix; cf. XV, iv.

364. De Perf. Just. Hom., viii.

365. De Civ. Dei, XIX, xvii.

manner of setting a limit to self-concern rather confirms the view that, for Augustine, Christian existence is profoundly individualistic, the reference to the community of faith furnishes a reminder of the great importance which he attached to membership of the catholic church, conceived in terms of submission to its authority. When this is recalled, it seems not at all improbable that the individualism of Augustine's ethic arose partly because he made the solidarity of the Christian community a presupposition of his thought.<sup>366</sup> This community is bound together by a common hope of 'security in the life to come', which, though it is not a full guarantee of Christian identity, is a genuine blessing of grace and the highest form of beatitude attainable 'in this mortal life'.<sup>367</sup> For Augustine's doctrine of grace, to modify slightly a remark of one of his shrewdest admirers, 'was a doctrine for fighting men'.<sup>368</sup>

The intimate relationship between Augustine's life and thought, signalled chiefly in the Confessions, has made him quite a popular subject of psychological investigation.<sup>369</sup> Certainly, we have seen

366. That is, his faith in its solidarity. This was, however, supported by a greater degree of realization than has obtained in post-Reformation Europe.

367. *De Civ. Dei.*, XIX, iv.

368. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 403f.. When Brown points out that Augustine's doctrine of predestination, which is but one aspect of his view of grace, disposed of the individual's anxiety for 'his ultimate identity', it should be added that this is because it suspends rather than presupposes God's final decision at 'that great and last judgment of His' (*De Civ. Dei.*, XX, i.) Therefore, 'the peace we have here' by faith' is rather solace to our misery, than any assurance of our felicity' (*Ibid.*, XIX, xxviii). For, as yet, 'many reprobate live amongst the elect' (*Ibid.*, XVIII, xlix). In other words, Augustine will no longer suggest that the whole church on earth is a part of the kingdom of heaven (*cf. sup.* p. 124, note 205). The warfare between the spirit and the flesh has made Christian existence perilous (v. e.g. *De Nupt. et Conc.* I, xxxv.)

369. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 31, note 4, gives a brief list of such studies.

nothing which would make us doubt that Augustine was deeply influenced by his mother and, largely through her, by the harsh ethos of African Christianity, or that the tension which he felt concerning his youthful sexual behaviour made the neo-Platonic approach to Christianity very appealing. However, we have also uncovered evidence that Augustine's intellectual achievement consists of more than the rationalization of his conditioned reflexes and that the existential character of his writings, without which psychological enquiry would be seriously restricted, is as much a tribute to his thought as to the various contributions to his psychological development. For, though he can hardly have been alone in his dissatisfaction with the fleeting moments of inspiration offered by the contemplative way of life, neither his rejection of it nor the later course of his life and thinking can be adequately explained if his development of the New Testament, especially the Pauline doctrine of grace, is ignored. Of course, his understanding of grace was influenced both by his former views and by the pressures of controversy, but this was an influence for which Augustine was fully prepared. For the significance which he attaches to the postponement of man's participation in the resurrection, though we may quarrel with it on other grounds,<sup>370</sup> at least demonstrates his awareness that grace deals with man-in-history. Thus, while he never rejected the 'monastic'

370. For example, the opportunity which it affords for neo-Platonic disparagement of the flesh and for crisis in the confidence of faith.

alternative and even allowed its claim to be the better course, he provided a theological, and not just an institutional, justification for the view that it is no more than an alternative form of the Christian life. The decline of the monastic form of Christianity was, therefore, foreshadowed almost at its very outset.

Owing to its 'respect' for man's historical condition, however, grace provides little challenge to the deep-rooted tendencies of the age. In the realm of ethics, for example, its effect is not to undermine a growing asceticism, but to inform this with a dynamic quality which prevents the specific principles and values from being cast into a static mould. Alongside of the new vitality which Augustine's conception of grace brings to his depiction of the Christian life, then, we find a confirmation of the traditional anti-sexual bias. For this the neo-Platonic character of his thought must bear primary responsibility, however much we may think it explicable in terms of deeper, psychological factors. What, in Ambrose, had been little more than the cause of a burning enthusiasm for virginity, has become, in Augustine, the basis for understanding the human predicament. The Pelagian controversy merely furnished the occasion for a dramatic statement of this point of view and, in so doing, highlighted its essential doctrinal field. For neither his concern with the problem of the origin of evil, nor the lines along which he seeks to resolve it, were new to the thought of the redoubtable African controversialist.

The degree to which Augustine's theology may be understood as an essay in self-understanding is revealed in his conviction that every

theological truth is fraught with ethical significances. In the most abstract statement like 'God is One', he finds implications for the 'order' of creation, the character of sin, and the destiny of man.<sup>371</sup> In other words, he discovers there, not just the basis for formal, ontological analysis, but the fixed point of reference for man in the midst of temporal flux. However, like the true mystic, he appreciated how far existence fell short of the divine unity and, as he was wont to remind the Pelagians, Christian thought and action should not so magnify the Creator as to render the Saviour 'superfluous'.<sup>372</sup> Indeed, for Augustine, Christ in his Incarnation may be described as the microcosm of true humanity. In his coming from God into the world he represents that humility which Augustine originally regarded as an example of the true style of life, but, as the notion of grace came to the fore, later interpreted as 'the manward aspect of faith in God as the source of all good'.<sup>373</sup> In his life he displayed 'that obedience of his body' for which his disciples must strive.<sup>374</sup> Supremely in his death he demonstrated the love of God which, as far as it can be explained, is the power of grace in the heart of man.<sup>375</sup> Finally, in his resurrection he pointed out the hope of all who believe in him.<sup>376</sup>

371. cf. e.g. *De Mor. Eccl. Cath.*, xiv, 24; *De Mor. Man.*, vi, 8 - vii, 9; *Conf.*, XII, vi, 6 - xv, 22.

372. *De Nat. et Grat.*, xxxix.

373. J. Burnaby, op. cit., p. 73; cf. *De Sancta Virg.*, xxxii ff., 32ff.; *De Grat. et Lib. Arb.*, xii; xxiv.

374. *De Nat. et Grat.*, xxviii; *De Perf. Just. Hom.*, xxi.

375. *Conf.*, X, xliii, 68ff.

376. *C. Faust.*, *Man.*, xix, 9; cf. xi, 3; xvi, 29.

Because he treats all subjects in terms of the principles which he regards as the basis of Christian existence, Augustine's thought possesses a unity characteristic of any more consciously developed system.<sup>377</sup> As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, his appreciation of the historical character of existence prevented him from attempting to elaborate such a system. This explains the lack of a full analysis of presuppositions, the failure to develop their implications to the full, and the loose terminology, which have bedevilled the work of his interpreters, but helped to make his writings a source of creative endeavour in subsequent theology and philosophy. It has been suggested that, had he developed his ideas more systematically, much of the poverty of early medieval theology might have been avoided.<sup>377</sup> This presupposes that, if they had been given the opportunity, the monks would have recognized their need of a deeper and broader approach to the Christian life. That, however, involves a failure to appreciate the character and strength of the monastic response to the breakdown of the Empire, a response whose aims Augustine had never apposed and which was to provide the lens through which theologians of the High Middle Ages would examine his work.

377. P. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 267 f..

## ETHICS AS A TECHNIQUE OF SALVATION : Western Monasticism.

During the fifth century, as the last vestiges of Roman rule were being erased, the monastic movement began to sow the seeds of a new form of authority in the lands which had formerly constituted the Western part of the Empire. The purpose for which the monasteries were established, however, was not to achieve secular power, but to promote a particular conception of the Christian life. Centuries were to elapse before the great monastic foundations would reap the full harvest of their influence in the affairs of the world, but, in the meantime, their interests determined the character of early medieval theology and ethics. Although the relevant literature was not entirely produced by men who had received their training within a monastery, very few works of this period fail to reflect the spiritual concerns of the monk.

Western monasticism sought to embody the ascetic ideal which had been elaborated in the Eastern regions of the Empire during the fourth century. News of the ascetic style of life quickly began to spread, the chief sources of information being Athanasius' biography of Anthony, who pioneered the life of solitude in the desert, and the correspondence of Jerome. Athanasius' work was partly responsible for Augustine's introduction 'to the multitudes in the monasteries and their manners so fragrant to thee, and to the teeming solitudes of the wilderness'.<sup>1</sup> Despite the publicity which it received, however, the ascetic cause at first tended to attract admirers rather than adherents in the West.

1. Conf., VII, vi, 15.

For the groups to whom its appeal was primarily directed had already evolved their own, more refined, form of life apart from society. In Italy especially, neo-Platonic ideas had prompted some members of the aristocracy to form communities in which, untrammelled by social cares, the individual could pursue the contemplative way of life. Augustine tells us that there was 'a monastery at Milan, outside the city's walls, full of good brothers under the fostering care of Ambrose'.<sup>2</sup> Usually, however, the communities consisted of a few relatives, or friends, who lived together on a private estate. Such were many of the families with whom Jerome corresponded and the group which Augustine and his companions established in Verecundus' country house at Cassiciacum for a few months following his conversion.<sup>3</sup> For a variety of reasons, these spiritual idealists failed to exert decisive influence upon the early development of monasticism. Since their conception of the Christian life presupposed an intellectual and material self-sufficiency which few outside their circles possessed, it was compelled to yield to the more popular aims of the ascetic movement. Moreover, when the Empire began to show signs of disintegration, their manner of life, which required a certain degree of social stability, will have appeared increasingly anachronistic.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid, IX, iii, 5.



One aspect of this irrelevance to the disturbed conditions of the fifth century was their lack of organization which must also have hindered effective presentation of their views. In spite of its limitations, however, the idealistic point of view might have contributed more to the formulation of the monastic ideal if its supporters had been less inclined to espouse the cause of Pelagius. For this not only raised doubts about the orthodoxy of their views, but led to the banishment of some of their leading spokesmen such as Julian of Eclanum. At the very time that the Pelagian controversy was brewing, the ascetic ideal began to make a notable impact on the mind of Latin Christians. After the dramatic events of A.D. 410 when Alaric and his Visigoths sacked Rome, a number of prominent figures retired to southern France, the cradle of western monasticism. Among these refugees was John Cassian, the man primarily responsible for articulating the ascetic ideal in its new setting. Towards the close of the fourth century, Cassian had spent some years in Egypt where he studied under various monks and solitaries of the desert. When he came to France he founded a monastery in Marseilles and, as a result of his experience in the East, he was soon recognized as an authority on the principles of the ascetic life. The bishop of a nearby town, who was preparing to establish a monastery, sought Cassian's advice and, in response to his request, Cassian wrote the Institutes which set forth the character and goals of monastic life. Later, he produced a companion-work, the Conferences, which profess to report the teachings of some

of the hermits and coenobites whom he met in Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

Through these works, Cassian secured a place of continuing authority in the monastic movement. In the Rule of Benedict, published some time during the sixth century, the members of the greatest medieval monastic order are instructed to read the works of Cassian, together with the 'Lives' of the ascetic fathers.<sup>5</sup> The large number of manuscripts in which Cassian's works have survived not only suggests that later generations usually adhered to Benedict's wishes, but provides further evidence of the importance of Cassian's thought for any estimate of the character of monasticism.

In the unsettled social conditions which recurred throughout the so-called Dark ages, the monasteries proved to be a most reliable source of ecclesiastical leadership. By providing a context in which the individual could be adequately trained, the monastic quest for independence had led to a new form of involvement in the affairs of the world. In order to appreciate the manner in which this new responsibility was exercised, we must consider the views of Gregory

4. The marked difference in literary style between the Conferences and The Sayings Of The Fathers (i.e. the Egyptian ascetics), which will become apparent in the citations which follow, provides a firm indication of Cassian's influence upon the presentation of the Egyptian point of view. Whether he has been faithful to the substance of each father's teaching is more difficult to determine. While minor contradictions in some of the views expressed in the Conferences suggest that he may have been, the lengthy discussions of grace and free will, an issue which only became prominent after he had left Egypt, suggest the contrary.

5. Rule, 73.

The Great who, in A.D.590, was translated from the abbacy of St. Andrew's, a monastery which he had founded in Rome, to the papal chair. Gregory was a statesman rather than a scholar but, although his writings display little original thought, they do reflect his achievements as an administrator. In his best-known work, the Book of Pastoral Rule,<sup>6</sup> Gregory attempts to explain his reluctant acceptance of the call to the papacy by depicting the responsibilities of ecclesiastical office. This book made an important contribution to the formulation and execution of the educational and ecclesiastical programmes initiated by Charlemagne at the beginning of the ninth century. As a means of promoting the imperial cause, it was established as a text-book for bishops and priests and, later, as a manual of episcopal office.<sup>7</sup> In view of Gregory's lasting influence upon medieval thought, which was henceforth assured, his writings offer a reliable indication of the monastic approach to secular life.

As the status accorded to Cassian and Gregory already suggests, monastic thought was deeply conservative. No modification of its ethical emphases becomes apparent until the close of the eleventh century.

6. English version: Pastoral Care, (trans. by H. Davis, S.J.), Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1950. This was the title of the first English translation of Gregory's work in the ninth century. It has clearly been derived from the opening words of the text: Pastoralis curae me pondera. In a letter to Leander of Seville, however, Gregory referred to the work as Liber Regulae Pastoralis, 'and this title', as Davis says, 'corresponds more precisely to its contents'.

7. v. Davis' introduction to Pastoral Care, p. 11, and references.

A brief survey of the tradition following the time of Gregory the Great will, therefore, be sufficient to complete our enquiry into the ethical significance of early medieval theology.

The trend towards asceticism in the patristic church reached its climax during the fourth century when the example of a few individuals, of whom the best-known are Anthony and Pachomius, inspired a growing number of men and women to adopt either the monastic or the solitary mode of life. The focus of the movement was Egypt where the deserts provided the solitaries with the isolation which they required and numerous monastic communities, many of which were established by Pachomius, catered for the needs of less intrepid spirits. A clear picture of the Egyptian ascetics may be obtained from the reports of their ideas and activities which were collected by various enthusiasts. The collection to which we shall refer, The Sayings Of The Fathers,<sup>8</sup> is that which possessed most influence in western monastic circles.

Outside Egypt the ascetics usually preferred the communal form of life to the more ambitious alternative proposed by the hermits. In Cappadocia, for example, the ideal of the common life found a staunch advocate in Basil of Caesarea who emphatically rejected the claim that

8. A translation of the most complete Latin collection which, in turn, was a translation from a lost Greek source. This Latin collection does, however, 'date from an earlier period than any of the extant Greek collections'. (O. Chadwick, in L.C.C., vol. XII, Western Asceticism, S.C.M., London, 1958, p.34).

the solitary life was superior and imposed a strict rule of obedience upon the members of his 'brotherhoods'.<sup>9</sup> A similar point of view can be found in The Sayings Of The Fathers. 'An old man said: "A brother who entrusts his soul in obedience to a spiritual father has a greater reward than the brother who retires alone to his hermitage". He justifies this dictum by pointing out that the solitaries "have followed their own will in withdrawing from the world" whereas "the obedient have cast away their self-will".<sup>10</sup>

Most of the Egyptian ascetics, however, tended to reject this verdict. They regarded the solitary life as the sublime expression of the view that perfection requires freedom from the constraints of social life. 'An old man said: "Make yourself in many things a fool in fleeing the company of men, or in mocking the world and the men of the world".<sup>11</sup> 'They used to say of Abba Theodore (surnamed of Pherme) that he kept these three rules beyond many others - poverty, abstinence, and running from the society of men'.<sup>12</sup> By such means the individual could overcome anxiety concerning his Christian identity. 'When Abba Arsenius was still at the palace, he prayed the Lord saying: "Lord, show me the way to salvation". And a voice came to him: "Arsenius, run from men and you

9. v. O. Chadwick in L.C.C., vol. XII, p.17.

10 Sayings, XIV, 19; cf. 9 (a saying of Saint Synesius).

11 Ibid, VIII, 24.

12 Ibid, I, 7. The Latin term 'abba' has been retained by the translator when the context suggests that it is a title of honour ('father') rather than a reference to the head of a monastic community ('abbot') Where necessary - in some of the Conferences of Cassian translated elsewhere than in L.C.C., vol. XII - I have done likewise.

shall be saved". He went to become a monk, and again prayed in the same words. And he heard a voice saying: "Arsenius, be solitary: be silent: be at rest. These are the roots of a life without sin".<sup>13</sup>

Astounding though it may seem, Augustine was scarcely exaggerating when he referred to the magnitude of the eastern ascetic movement. Indeed, so many people began to withdraw from secular society that the Emperor Theodosius, himself a Christian, was once provoked to ask Ambrose what he would do 'with these fanatical monks'.<sup>14</sup> The popularity of the new way of life helps to explain several notable features of ascetic thought.

First, we may draw attention to the manner in which the Fathers of the Desert advocate their cause. Relying upon the apparent attractiveness of the ascetic ideal, they advance no arguments in its favour but are content merely to describe its implications. Thus, 'The Sayings' consists of a series of aphorisms, concise descriptions of the character or fundamental rules of the ascetic life, and accounts of significant episodes in the lives of leading figures in the ascetic movement. This form of material defies systematic presentation. Although the collector has managed to endow it with a semblance of rational order by arranging it under general headings, his difficulty is illustrated by the reports which we have so far cited, three of which

13. Ibid, II, 8.

14. Cited in C.N. Cochrane, op. cit., p. 269.

deal with the theme of solitude yet find their respective places in different sections of the collection. The manner in which the material is presented matches its unsystematic character. All forms of literary sophistication are forgone in order to achieve a style which is both simple and direct. Together, then, the matter and the style of The Sayings make an immediate appeal to the will of the reader, challenging him to imitate the decisive action of men like Arsenius who, without prior reflection, forsook the ways of the world and the company of men.

The ascetics discouraged intellectual enquiry, however, because they considered that it was not only unnecessary but liable to subvert Christian faith. When Abba Anthony was baffled as he meditated upon God's toleration of various forms of worldly injustice, 'a voice came to him: "Anthony, look to yourself: these are the judgments of God, and it is not good for you to know them"'.<sup>15</sup> Abba Poeman tells Abba Ammon that, if he cannot refrain from discussing spiritual matters, "it is much better to talk about the saying of the elders than about the Scriptures. For the danger is no small one".<sup>16</sup> At all costs heresy must be avoided. 'Abba Theodore of Pherme said: "If a friend of yours is tempted by lust, give him a helping hand if you can and pull him back. But if he falls into heresy, and persists in spite of your

15. Sayings, XV, 1.

16. Ibid, XI, 20; cf. X, 39; XV, 4; 10.

efforts, go away quickly, cut off his friendship. For if you dally with him, you might be dragged with him into the deeps".<sup>17</sup> By their desire for orthodoxy or a sure Christian identity<sup>18</sup> the ascetics were led finally to an anti-intellectualist position. 'Abba Evagrius once said to Abba Arsenius: "How is it that we educated and learned men have no virtue, and Egyptian peasants have a great deal?" Abba Arsenius answered: "We have nothing, because we go chasing worldly knowledge. These Egyptian peasants have acquired virtues by hard work".<sup>19</sup>

Further evidence of the widespread appeal of the ascetic movement may be discerned in its acceptance of notions which will have been current in popular piety. In particular, ascetic literature betrays a strong tendency towards materialism, the view which Tertullian systematically elaborated. Even in his depiction of hell, however, Tertullian cannot equal the crudity of many of the visions which the ascetics are reported to have seen. One story tells of a man who, when demons attacked him and aroused his bodily passions, determined to return to the world. His father persuaded him to spend forty days in the 'inner desert' before making a final decision. 'And after he had been there twenty days, he saw the demon coming against him. There stood before him a person like a negro woman, ill-smelling and ugly'.

17. Ibid, X, 23.

18. v. e.g. Ibid, XIV, 13.

19. Ibid, X, 5; cf., XV, 7.



Confronted with this incarnation of the world's delights, which is in marked contrast with neo-Platonic appreciation of their genuine, though limited, nature, the young man inevitably chooses to remain with his father. Of course, both the sensitivity and the materialistic character of the ascetic imagination will have been heightened by the physical hardships to which both monks and hermits exposed themselves. As the father says when his son returns from the desert: "If you had stayed there forty days, and kept my command right to the end, you would have seen still greater things".<sup>20</sup>

Few people would think of renouncing the comforts of civilization unless social life had become highly intolerable. We may, therefore, concur with the judgment that the popularity of the ascetic movement constituted a most emphatic protest 'against conditions in the New Republic'. Neither Constantine nor his successors had managed 'to effect any real amalgamation between ideals so incongruous as those cherished respectively by the Church and by the state'.<sup>21</sup> It is important to remember, however, that the church was inescapably implicated in the Constantinian experiment and that its involvement produced mixed effects. What it gained in security and popularity, for example, it tended to lose in standards of behaviour. This state of affairs formed

20. Ibid, V, 23.

21. C.N. Cochrane, op. cit., p. 343.

the specific object of the ascetic protest.

The ascetics were convinced that the moral laxity of the churches was undermining the principles of Christian identity. Jerome, as we have already seen, regarded life in the average congregation as a threat to virginity.<sup>22</sup> Some ordained ascetics refuse to perform their duties because, they ironically claim, only "men who live innocently" can accept such responsibility.<sup>23</sup> 'Abba Macarius once said of himself: "When I was a young man, and was staying in my cell in Egypt, they caught me, and made me a cleric at a village. And because I did not want to minister, I fled to another place". Nevertheless, he was still unable to escape the harmful influence of the church. When "a girl of the village" became pregnant she accused Macarius of being the father and, after the villagers had subjected him to various indignities, the girl's parents forced him "to guarantee her support". He was only released from his plight when an extended labour prompted the girl to confess the truth.<sup>24</sup> Abba Isaac discerns another factor in the debility of the congregation. He said to his brothers: "Do not bring children here. Children were the reason why four churches in Scete were deserted".<sup>25</sup>

22. v. sup., p. 63.

23. Sayings, XV, 27 (Abba Mathois); cf. 21 (Abba Theodore).

24. Ibid, XV, 25.

25. Ibid, X, 32; cf. 87.

The ascetic reaction to new tendencies in the life of the churches was based upon a profoundly pessimistic view of human life. Certainly, the ultimate goal of the ascetic life was positive, but it was considered to be unattainable under the conditions of finite existence. Therefore, although the Desert Fathers were preserved from radical cynicism, their approach to life was virtually suicidal. Abba John the Short summarizes their attitude. "The gateway to God is humility. Our fathers endured with much suffering and so entered the city of God with joy".<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Abba Poeman states that hatred of bodily comfort and vainglory will enable the monk to "be free of this world".<sup>27</sup>

'Saint Syncletice', the woman most frequently quoted in The Sayings, explains how the ascetic should regard his body. When teaching that the difficulties which may arise because of illness should be welcomed, she said: "We need these tribulations to destroy the desires of our body - in this they serve the same purpose as fasting and austerity".<sup>28</sup> The purpose of such treatment is specified by Abba Hyperichius, who said: "When the monk's body is dried up with fasting, it lifts his soul from the depths".<sup>29</sup> Since, however, the soul possesses no more intrinsic value than any other element of creation,

26. Ibid, XV, 22.

27. Ibid, I, 15.

28. Ibid, VII, 17.

29. Ibid, IV, 47.

it too must be subjugated. A man must humble himself in order "to make progress".<sup>30</sup> Humility involves bearing "scorn and injury and loss with patience".<sup>31</sup> Above all, it requires that "we weep for sin, and for our neighbour's ignorance, . . . so that we may not relax our purpose to attain to true goodness".<sup>32</sup> Even self-mortification, then, is not good in itself; it is but the means of achieving salvation.

In his acts of self-denial the ascetic anticipates his death prior to which his freedom from the world remains uncertain and peace is impossible. Therefore, as the dying Arsenius informs his companions, the psychological basis of the ascetic life is fear.<sup>33</sup>

'An old man visited another old man. In their conversation one said: "I am dead to the world". And the other said: "Do not be self-confident until you die. You may say about yourself that you are dead: but Satan is not dead"'.<sup>34</sup> As Saint Syncletice said: "'We have no security in this world"'.<sup>35</sup>

This preoccupation with the need to preserve his own Christian identity allowed the ascetic little time for concern with the problems of his neighbour. 'Abba Allois said: "Unless a man say in his heart,

30. Ibid, XV, 77.

31. Ibid, XV, 84.

32. Ibid, X, 71 (Saint Syncletice).

33. Ibid, XV, 9.

34. Ibid, XI, 38.

35. Ibid, XI, 34.

Only I and God are in the world, he shall not find rest".<sup>36</sup> The monk should emulate the soldier or the hunter who, when he joins an expedition, "fights for himself alone".<sup>37</sup> Of course, the Desert Fathers admitted the virtue of hospitality<sup>38</sup> and recognized that charity includes snatching "your neighbour from his sins, so far as you can".<sup>39</sup> On principle, however, they regarded any form of social intercourse as an obstacle to the single-minded pursuit of their ideal. 'Abba Mark said to Abba Arsenius: "Why do you run away from us?" The old man said: "God knows I love you. But I cannot be with God and with men. The countless hosts of the angels have but a single will, while men have many wills. So I cannot let God go, and come and be with men".<sup>40</sup> A protest which was largely prompted by a circumstantial moral decline in the patristic church thus concluded by challenging the very idea of an organized Christianity. For the spirit of compromise which is involved in any sphere of social intercourse is fundamentally opposed to the devotion required by the ascetic ideal.

Owing to the unsystematic character of ascetic thought, the Desert Fathers deal only with matters of special interest to themselves.

36. Ibid, XI, 5.

37. Ibid, XI, 41.

38. Section XIII of The Sayings is devoted to the subjects of hospitality and mercy.

39. Sayings, XVII, 13. The whole of this section deals with charity.

40. Sayings, XVII, 5.

Man's sexual nature receives considerable attention<sup>41</sup> and, as their attitude of world-denial and their individualism would lead us to expect, the ascetics discover no value in it whatsoever. Sexual desire is uniformly described as lust and numerous reports highlight the subtle and persistent character of its threat to man's progress in virtue. The memory of pictures may be sufficient to arouse lust.<sup>42</sup> 'They said of the Abbess Sarah that for thirteen years she was fiercely attacked by the demon of lust'. Through perseverance, however, she finally triumphed.<sup>43</sup> In short, as Abba Mathois said, "lust is essential death".<sup>44</sup>

Two implications of the ascetic rejection of sexuality should be noted. First, the Desert Fathers inculcate a severe anti-feminism. When 'a virgin<sup>45</sup> lady from Rome' visited Abba Arsenius in the desert, her request for his prayers was greeted with the retort: "'I pray God that he will blot the memory of you from my heart'". Archbishop Theophilus comforted her sorrow by explaining that "the enemy uses women to attack holy men" and that, in fact, "he prays for your soul all the time".<sup>46</sup> When one of the ascetics had to carry his aged mother across a river he 'took off his cloak, and wrapt it round his hands, so as not to touch his mother's body', telling her that,

41. One of the largest sections of The Sayings (V) is concerned solely with lust.

42. Sayings, V, 6.

43. Ibid, V, 10.

44. Ibid, V, 7.

45. My italics.

46. Sayings, II, 7.

"a woman's body is fire. Simply because I was touching you, the memory of other women came into my soul".<sup>47</sup> Clearly, the ascetic manner of life has made its followers unusually susceptible to lust. The wiles of the harlots are but the most obvious source of this temptation.<sup>48</sup> However, the ascetics welcomed their liability as proof that, unlike men of the world, they were engaged in the struggle against evil.<sup>49</sup>

Since she is a potential temptress, woman must crush her femininity. With the Abbess Sarah, she should be able to say: "I am a woman in sex, but not in spirit".<sup>50</sup>

The other important implication of the ascetic treatment of sex is a stern opposition to pleasure. 'The holy Syncletice' said: "The pleasures of the wealthy world must not seduce you, as if those pleasures were useful. Because of this pleasure they honour, the art of cooking. But by rigorous fasting you should trample on those pleasures. Never be sated with bread, nor want wine".<sup>51</sup> Abba Hyperichius draws attention to the connection between such pleasures and the activation of sexual desire. He said: "Fasting is the monk's reign over sin. The man who stops fasting is like a stallion who lusts the moment he sees a mare".<sup>52</sup>

47. Ibid, IV, 68.

48. v. e.g. Ibid, X, 21; XVI, 20.

49. v. e.g. Ibid, V, 5. (Abba Cyrus of Alexandria); VII, 13 (Abba Poemen); 43; X, 26 (Abba Theodore).

50. Ibid, X, 73.

51. Ibid, IV, 43.

52. Ibid, IV, 46.

The Egyptian attempt to maintain the priority of the solitary form of ascetic life proved to be unsuccessful. Among the factors which contributed to its failure was its initial popularity. As the number of hermits grew and enquirers such as Cassian and his friend Germanus began to seek them out, the individual was forced to sacrifice an increasing amount of time to the provision of hospitality. If he tried to escape this invasion of his privacy by finding a more desolate retreat, his opportunity for spiritual exercise was still hindered because he had to pay greater attention to the problem of supplying his physical needs. Other undesirable features of the Egyptian movement were exacerbated by the fame which its followers acquired. In the first place, this heightened the danger of pride which, as we have seen, the Desert Fathers considered to be a fundamental obstacle to spiritual progress. Also, the hope of achieving renown attracted many charlatans to the Egyptian scene. They merely aggravated a tendency towards moral laxity which was inevitable in such an unorganized movement. Too many beginners had little appreciation of the requirements of the ascetic ideal. Their only recourse was to heed the example of Abba Evagrius who, soon after he had become a monk, 'went to an old man and said: "Abba, speak to me a word by which I may be saved"'.<sup>53</sup> This was hardly an adequate means of instruction.

The significance of these Egyptian developments was not overlooked.

53. Ibid, X, 19.



by Cassian when he was formulating the principles of the monastic life in southern France. He recounts the advantages of communal life in the 'Conference of Abba John'. 'In this monastery, I do not have to arrange my day's work. I am not bothered with buying or selling, I do not have to think about storing food. I am not anxious about preparing to receive the numerous visitors as well as look after the residents - and above all I am not subject to popularity nor therefore to the temptation to arrogance, which is the worst thing in the desert life, and which has been known to do away, in God's sight, with the merit of desert austerities'. He then proceeds to criticize the behaviour of contemporary hermits. Referring to their diet, he states that they not only fail to match the standards set by 'the stricter ancients', but 'are even beginning to be dissatisfied with the lax rule of the present generation'.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast with Basil of Caesarea, then, Cassian presents the case for monasticism without attempting to disparage the aims of the hermit. He claims that the monastic state is superior because it represents a more reliable means of pursuing the ascetic ideal. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that, to some extent, this is an argument from contingency: the break-down of the solitary mode of life was partly due to the force of circumstances. Although his arguments concentrate upon the different methods of the monk and the hermit, however, Cassian

54. Conferences, XIX, 6; cf, 5; XVIII, 7 (Abba Piamun) To avoid confusion with the Confessions of Augustine, we shall use the abbreviation Conf. for Cassian's second major work.

does admit that their goals cannot be identical. In particular, the individual who lives 'in a community and among a crowd of men' is deprived of 'that ineffable eagerness' which characterizes the solitary 'way of life' and this diminution of spiritual zeal may lead to 'some little loss in purity of heart'. On the other hand, the hermit sacrifices the possibility of perfect humility which the coenobite can achieve by practising obedience.<sup>55</sup>

Cassian sometimes makes statements which suggest that he regarded the enthusiasm of the Egyptian ascetics as a mixed blessing. Of particular interest in this regard is his account of Abba Theonas' conversion to the ascetic life.<sup>56</sup> In response to Christ's counsel of perfection, interpreted as a challenge to the Christian who lives under the law and, therefore, 'never brings forth fruits worthy of his vocation and the grace of Christ', Theonas endeavoured to persuade his wife 'that together they might serve God in sanctity and chastity'. She refused to comply with his request, saying that she needed his sexual attention and might fall into sin if he should leave her, in which case the guilt would be his.<sup>57</sup> Neither her pleading nor her warning could move Theonas who was prepared, if necessary, to execute his plan without her. Theonas justified his stand on existential, ethical,

55. Confes., XIX, 6 and 8.

56. Ibid, XXI, 5-10 (Abba John).

57. Augustine would have supported her arguments. v. sup. p.117f..

and Scriptural grounds. He claimed that the insecurity of human nature meant that it was dangerous to remain 'any longer mixed up with carnal desires and works'. Next, he stated 'that it was not right for anyone to cut himself off from that virtue to which he had learnt that he ought by all means to cleave'. Finally, he argued that if Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of man's heart, Christ would surely permit it for the sake of chastity, especially since he exhorted his disciples to hate and forsake their families on his account.

Cassian was not entirely convinced that these arguments could vindicate Theonas' conduct. He was particularly disturbed by the implications of such an action. No-one, he hastens to point out, should imagine 'that we have invented this for the sake of encouraging divorce, as we not only in no way condemn marriage, but also, following the words of the Apostle, say: "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled"<sup>58</sup>. However, his last word on the subject is one of qualified approval. After mentioning various signs of divine favour in Theonas' later life and some appreciative remarks of the Desert Fathers, Cassian concludes: 'I fancy that the judgment of so many spiritual men, uttered with God as its author, was not wrong, as it was, as was said above, confirmed by such wonderful signs'. Cassian's respect for the Egyptian movement, which prevented him from censuring

58. Hebrews, 13:4.

its more extreme view of the requirements of the ascetic ideal, made him a shrewd advocate of the monastic cause. For, had he explicitly criticized ascetic excesses, he would have alienated many of his supporters and might have appeared to condone the tendency to relax monastic discipline.

The element of moderation in Cassian's thought has a firm psychological basis. Like Augustine, he discerns three principles of human behaviour. Two of these, the spirit and the flesh, are in perpetual conflict<sup>59</sup> as a result of 'the fall of the first man'. Cassian's description of this 'contest' is true to the ascetic tradition. The flesh is the seat of lust 'which rushes blindly towards sin, (and) revels in those delights which are connected with present ease'. The spirit, however, 'does not even tolerate natural desires'. The reconciliation of 'these two desires' is sought in 'the free will of the soul' which, owing to its role as mediator, becomes 'somewhat worthy of blame'. For it 'neither delights in the excesses of sin, nor acquiesces in the sorrows of virtue'. In itself, therefore, 'this free will would never lead us to attain true perfection, but would plunge us into a most miserable condition of lukewarmness'. This conclusion enables Cassian to depart from the views of the Desert Fathers by attributing a modicum of value to the flesh. Although it is the sinful factor in the situation produced by the sin of Adam, the

59. He refers to Galatians, 5:17.

flesh contributes to an inner conflict which destroys the complacency of the will. Furthermore, if the will chooses to be directed by the spirit, the frailty of the flesh tempers enthusiasm and thus, 'a sort of equitable balance in the scales of our body' is achieved.<sup>60</sup>

The monastery undertook the task of preparing 'the athlete of Christ' to face the contests which would arise from his bodily condition.<sup>61</sup> The monk needed 'to know the nature of all faults, and the manner of their cure', and 'to discover the order of the virtues and form (his) mind by their perfection'.<sup>62</sup> This systematic approach to the demands of the ascetic life was founded upon the notion of the unity of the virtues and vices, an idea which had been implicit in the Desert Fathers' reduction of man's activity to a means of achieving either salvation or damnation.<sup>63</sup> Cassian states that 'of all the virtues the nature is but one and the same' and he who is weak in one must be weak in all. The essential purpose of the virtues is also identical. In opposition to the vices, they teach 'a man (to) despise all things present as transitory' and to fix 'his mental gaze on those things which are immovable and eternal' so that he 'already contemplates in heart - though still in the flesh - the blessedness of his future life'.<sup>64</sup>

60. Confs., IV, 7 and 12 (Abba Daniel).

61. Institutes, V, 19.

62. Confs. XIV, 3 (Abba Nestoros). Note the similarity between this description of 'practical perfection' and Aristotle's account of the man of practical wisdom. cf. Ethica Nicomachea, VI, 13; (English translation by Sir David Ross, in The World's Classics Series: The Nicomachean Ethics Of Aristotle, O.U.P. London, pp. 156-8)

63. v. sup. pp. 175ff, and note, for example, Abba Hyperichius' statement of the connection between fasting and chastity, v. p. 180.

64. Inst., V, 9 and 14.

In spite of his affirmation of the unity of the virtues, Cassian was forced to admit that chastity and fasting differed in quality from the other virtues. For the vices which the above-named virtues combat, fornication and gluttony, 'exist in us naturally' and represent a part of human nature which has not been redeemed. Christ 'truly fulfilled every function which belongs to us, and bore all human infirmities' but 'He had no experience of the fiery darts of lust'.<sup>65</sup> Since they are embedded in the human condition, the natural vices are the most difficult to suppress. Therefore, the individual 'who wants to extinguish the natural desires of the flesh, should first hasten to overcome those vices whose seat is outside our nature'.<sup>66</sup> Then he can proceed to the special treatment which lust requires. As well as the mental determination needed to fight vices such as anger or greed, one must employ 'bodily chastisement' and avoid forming strong personal relationships for these may lead to entanglement in the ways of the world.

Because it is so hard to achieve, chastity is the supreme mark of Christian identity. Consequently, the chastity of non-believers remains a stumbling-block. Following the lead of the Desert Fathers, Cassian provides a conveniently non-verifiable solution to this problem. The 'philosophers' certainly possessed continence of the flesh but, as Socrates admitted, they could not attain the 'internal purity of mind

65. Confes., V, 4-6 (Abba Serapion).

66. Inst. V, 12.

67. Confes., V, 4. The latter requirement is described in terms of frequent changes of environment, which, of course, was not a live option for the monk.

and continual purity of body' which is the gift of God.<sup>68</sup>

The emphasis which Cassian places on the technical questions of ethics is an indication of the conservative character of monastic thought. The fundamental principles of the Christian life have been established and agreement has been reached concerning the main components of virtue and vice. Scholarship can, therefore, concentrate upon consolidation, refinement, and detailed explication of the elements in the moral struggle. The conservative spirit of monasticism was reinforced by a suspicion of worldly learning which derived from the attitude of the Eastern ascetics.<sup>69</sup> In the 'First Conference of Abba Moses', the monks are warned against 'philosophical teachings which have an apparent meaning consonant with religion and attractive to religious men, like cheap brass coins manufactured to resemble gold and so impoverishing their cheated owners for ever: they entice them away again to the world's clangour or to the bombast of heretical thought'.<sup>70</sup>

68. Confs., XIII, 5 (Abba Chaeremon); cf. Sayings, XVI, 16. Since gluttony, as well as lust, exists 'in us naturally', we may ask why fasting is considered to be a less distinctive feature of Christian identity than chastity. Saint Syncletice implicitly admits the legitimacy of this question when she contrasts the fasting of Christians and 'the devil's disciples' (Sayings, X, 72). Christian fasting, she claims, is distinguished by its moderation. This suggests that the answer to our question depends upon the relative necessity of nutrition and sexual activity. Unless one wishes to commit suicide, one must eat and drink, that is, accept an accommodation to the world. Total rejection of sexual activity may sometimes produce disastrous effects in the life of an individual but at least it will not inevitably cause his death. In general, then, chastity (as the fathers defined it) offers a more adequate symbol than fasting of the ascetic break with the world.

69. v. sup. pp. 172f..

70. Confs., I, 20.

Elsewhere it is stated that 'true knowledge is only acquired by true worshippers of God'.<sup>71</sup>

Another effect of monastic preoccupation with the 'battle' for which 'a soldier of Christ' must be 'ever ready',<sup>72</sup> was a tendency to depreciate the contemplative life which had previously been a prominent feature of Western spirituality.<sup>73</sup> Cassian tells us that, according to Abba Paphnutius, there are four stages in the life of a renunciant. These consist of the rejection of all worldly goods; the extinction of the worldly affections of soul and body; mental detachment from things present and visible and contemplation of the invisible things to come; and finally 'after all the passions have been driven out', true 'purity of heart' which is the sheer gift of God. However, although he grants that the contemplative achievement is greater, Paphnutius claims that the individual who reaches the second stage has attained perfection.<sup>74</sup> Abba John further discourages the monk from aspiring to a life of contemplation by suggesting that this is the preserve of the hermit.<sup>75</sup> Yet we also find just the opposite point of view reported in the 'Conferences'. Abba Moses taught that the monk's goal was 'to cleave with (his) mind to the things of God and to God himself'. Therefore,

71. Confs., XIV, 15. Reference is made to Colossians 2:3 in support of this claim.

72. Inst., I, 1.

73. v. sup. pp. 164f..

74. Confs., III, 6 and 10. In III, 22, however, it is stated that all perfection consists in the third renunciation. This reflects the ambivalence of the monastic attitude to contemplation. v. inf.

75. Confs., XIX, 8.



'fasting, watching, meditation on Scripture, nakedness and poverty are not perfection, but the means towards it; not the end of our discipline, but the means to that end'.<sup>76</sup> Thus the contemplative ideal managed to make some contribution to the development of western monasticism.<sup>77</sup>

As well as moderating and systematizing the demands of the ascetic life, the monasteries inevitably heightened the importance of 'communal' virtues such as obedience, charity and patience. The monk had to aim 'at mortifying and crucifying all his self-will' and learn to bear 'the weaknesses of his brethren in the community'.<sup>78</sup> This, however, involved little departure from the individualism which lies at the heart of the ascetic ideal. The virtues remain means by which the monk pursues 'the blessedness of his (sic) future life'.<sup>79</sup> The 'communal' virtues possess the added value of promoting peace whose chief purpose is not to foreshadow the spiritual concord of the perfect,<sup>80</sup> but to enable the individual to undertake his quest for holiness with the minimum of distraction. For, as Abba John is reported to have said, whatever the individual may lose by abandoning the solitary life, he can

76. Confs., I, 7f..

77. Thus, many monasteries established hermitages to which the monks could retreat after serving 'a mature probation in the monasteries' (Benedict, Rule, 1<sup>st</sup>).

78. Confs., XIX, 8f.

79. Inst., V, 14.

80. cf. Confs., XVI, 5 (Abba Joseph) - true friendship, which is based on a common mind, exists only amongst the perfect.

rely upon the monastery to provide him with the 'peace of mind and freedom from business. . . which is indispensable'.<sup>81</sup>

One of Cassian's most valuable contributions to the young monastic movement was to clarify its attitude in relation to the fundamental issue of the Pelagian controversy. He aimed at establishing a compromise between the views of Augustine and Pelagius on grace and free will and, largely for this reason, there is an element of inconsistency in his own position.<sup>82</sup> When he writes that 'we must take care not to refer all the merits of the saints to the Lord in such a way as to ascribe nothing but what is evil and perverse to human nature',<sup>83</sup> Cassian is clearly dissociating himself from some of the statements made by Augustine. In opposition to the Pelagians, however, he can express himself in a manner strongly reminiscent of Augustine. Thus he claims that man's will is 'more readily inclined to vice either through want of knowledge of what is good, or through the delights of passion'. Consequently, the beginning and completion of good will is always inspired by God.<sup>84</sup>

Although Cassian's estimation of the will's intrinsic capacity for good may have fluctuated, his basic answer to the Pelagian question was simple and firm. Scripture declares both 'the grace of God and the

81. Confs., XIX, 6; cf. Sayings, II, passim; Benedict, Rule, 6.

82. A further reason may be that the issue is discussed in the conferences of different fathers. But v. note 4 on p. 167.

83. Confs., XIII, 12.

84. Confs., III, 12 and 19.

freedom of the will'. Some, like the apostles Paul and Matthew, are 'led to the quest of virtue' by God's grace alone; others, like Zaccheus and the thief on the cross, do not require this initial assistance. However, perfection is always God's 'free gift' because, although his grace does not prevent the will from having 'to fight by its own efforts against its spiritual adversaries', victory is only possible when it receives the divine protection. Therefore, the doctrine of the Pelagians is emphatically rejected. That salvation depends entirely upon faith is 'the profane notion of some who attribute everything to free will and lay down that the grace of God is dispensed in accordance with the desert of each man; but we plainly assert our unconditional opinion that the grace of God is superabounding, and sometimes overflows the narrow limits of man's lack of faith'.<sup>85</sup> In view of official condemnation of Pelagius' teaching, this judgment was certainly expedient. Nevertheless, without sacrificing the freedom of the will which is presupposed by Cassian's emphasis on the moral struggle, it does conform to his conception of the ambivalent status of the will caught between the desires of the spirit and the flesh.

Cassian did not allow the monks to forget that their style of life originated largely as a protest against the debilitating effects of the church's expansion. The 'Conference of Abba Piamun' outlines the history of the ascetic movement. As 'crowds of strangers and men of different races flowed into the Church', 'the faith of the whole

85. Conf., XIII, 9-16.

Christian body began to grow cold'. For their 'pagan habits' sapped the fervour of 'the primitive Christians' and caused 'the leaders of the Church as well as the new converts . . . to lose something of their strict discipline'. Consequently, those who did not want 'to be infected by lax Christians' left the church 'and dwelt in places outside the cities, or in even more remote haunts', where they could 'keep . . . the rules which they remembered were given by the apostles to the whole Church'.<sup>86</sup>

The defiant spirit of the early ascetics was reflected in the jealousy with which the monasteries guarded their autonomy. In his Rule, Benedict stresses that when 'a priest asks to be received into the monastery his request shall not be allowed without due consideration'. Moreover, although the priest is entitled to 'conduct services, if the abbot so ordains', his monastic rank depends upon 'the time when he entered the monastery, and not the place which is granted him out of respect to his priestly office'.<sup>87</sup> While this regulation testifies to the independent nature of monasticism, however, it also indicates that the new institution was quickly finding favour in the eyes of the church. For, if few ecclesiastics had been impressed by the monastic ideal, the terms of their admission to the monastery would have remained a minor issue. Recognition of the monk as the embodiment of Christian

86. Confes., XVIII, 5.

87. Rule, 60.

perfection was also accompanied by a growing demand for monastic leadership in the church. An outstanding example of this process occurred at the close of the century in which Benedict produced his Rule when, by popular acclaim, Gregory I was elevated to the papacy.<sup>88</sup> Thus the power over the world which the earlier generations of ascetics had conceived in wholly negative terms was converted into ecclesiastical authority and, thence, into influence over the affairs of medieval society.

The title of Gregory's manual for church leaders, Liber Regulae Pastoralis, suggests the direction taken by monastic statesmanship. The work sought to provide an ecclesiastical counterpart to the monastic rule (regula) and it required the cleric to imitate the virtues of the monk. In order to be able to intercede 'for the people with God', Gregory writes, one must possess 'the knowledge of being in His favour by reason of the merits of one's life'.<sup>89</sup> Above all, this means that ecclesiastics must be 'men who are unspotted in their zeal for chastity'.<sup>90</sup> Unlike monks, of course, 'pastors' are involved in 'habitual intercourse with men'.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, 'they must always fear and watchfully take heed lest, while engaged in external cares, they be weaned away entirely from aspirations of their inner selves'.<sup>92</sup> Charity, which 'embraces both God and neighbour', is

88. Of course, being a monk was not a sufficient qualification for the papacy! Gregory had embarked on a successful political career before he decided to become a monk.

89. Lib. Reg. Past., I, x.

90. Ibid, I, v; cf. x. In both cases, this requirement is listed first.

91. Lib. Reg. Past., II, xi.

92. Ibid, II, vii.

the crowning virtue but, while 'the mind is intent on' its precepts, 'it remains beyond doubt, that the flesh must be mortified by abstinence'.<sup>93</sup> Also, after 'restoring others to health', the preacher 'must not disregard his own health and develop tumours of pride'. 'Hence, it is necessary that when a wealth of virtue flatters us, the eye of the soul should turn its gaze on its infirmities, and for its own good it should prostrate itself'. In short, the ruler of the church must emulate the self-mortification of the ascetic if he wishes to gain the approval of 'the just Judge'.<sup>94</sup>

The larger part of Gregory's work consists of advice concerning pastoral treatment of the laity. Since the pastor should adapt his teaching to the character of the recipients,<sup>95</sup> Gregory endeavours to describe the various classes of men with whom the clerics will have to deal.<sup>96</sup> In his analysis, Gregory shows little desire to moderate the implications of the ascetic ideal. For example, married Christians are conceived to be in a most ambivalent situation. Their mind, Gregory claims, 'is both weak and steadfast, inasmuch as it cannot altogether disregard temporal matters, and yet is able in desire, to unite itself with the eternal. Though the mind is now debased in

93. Ibid, II, iii.

94. Ibid, IV.

95. Ibid, III, Prologue.

96. Gregory presents each type of character in conjunction with its polar equivalent and seeks to curb the excesses of both. However, he is not engaged in an Aristotelian quest for 'the mean'. His method is based on that adopted by Gregory of Nazianzus in a similar work. (v. III, Prologue).

fleshly delights, it must grow strong with the refreshment which supernal hope affords; and though it possesses worldly things for use on the way, it should hope for the enjoyment of divine things at the end. It should not give itself entirely to the things it is now engaged in lest it wholly fall from what it should steadfastly hope for'.<sup>97</sup>

Gregory defends 'the most honourable estate of wedlock' in the traditional manner. Provided that one has 'not yet vowed what is better', marriage is legitimate because it provides a refuge 'for the weak' who 'suffer from the storms of temptations' and because it serves 'the purpose of procreation'. However, as I Corinthians 7:6 'suggests', 'the fair form of intercourse' is disfigured by 'the presence of sin'. Gregory identifies the sinful element of intercourse with pleasure and this enables him to demand self-mortification from the married. For God 'heals the diseases of our sins by their contrary antidotes, so that we who have departed from Him by the delight of pleasures, may return to Him in tearful grief'.<sup>98</sup> The foundations of the medieval penitential system were being laid.

Despite his aversion to the marital state, Gregory does admit that the lives of those who enter it can be enriched. Referring to Galatians 6:2, he advises the pastor to exhort the married 'to bear with mutual patience the things in which they sometimes displease each other, and to assist each other to salvation by mutual encouragement'. He also

97. Lib. Reg. Past., III, xxvii. Unless noted, the citations in the two following paragraphs are drawn from this section of the work.

98. Lib. Reg. Past., III, xxx.

points out that the state of wedlock, though essentially inferior to the state of virginity, is not a major hindrance to spiritual progress. Virgins should 'consider that the life of the continent is often put to shame by the conduct of worldly persons' before they 'extol themselves above those who are married'.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the married can never achieve the reward which heaven reserves for true virgins and Gregory's warnings to the latter are subject to the same ambiguity as those of Augustine. In God's judgment, intention and 'the character of our conduct' may be more important than 'our rank',<sup>100</sup> and 'the consciousness of virtue' may be 'a pitfall for the soul',<sup>101</sup> but the virgins must still be made aware that they are treading a loftier path so that they will appreciate their heavier responsibilities.<sup>102</sup> In other words, their humility is a means of achieving their more exalted goal rather than a sense of utter dependence upon divine grace.<sup>103</sup>

Gregory's contribution to the thought and practice of the medieval church was not restricted to the 'Book of Pastoral Rule'. His extensive correspondence also proved to be a fruitful source of guidance. The letters reveal the administrator's concern with the minutiae of human behaviour. In answer to some questions posed by Augustine of Canterbury, for example, Gregory has to deal with such matters as the permissible

99. Ibid, III, xxviii.

100. On the importance of intention, v. Lib. Reg. Past., III, xxxii; Epistle XI, lxiv (answer to tenth question). On the importance of conduct, v. Lib. Reg. Past., III, xxviii.

101. Lib. Reg. Past., IV.

102. v. Ibid, III, xxviii.

103. The question is not whether the humility which is called for is genuine, but what form of self-understanding constitutes its basis.



degree of marital kinship and the culpability of nocturnal emissions. Marriage between siblings and first cousins must be prohibited, he states, because 'we have learnt by experience that progeny cannot ensue from such marriages' and 'the sacred law forbids to uncover the nakedness of kindred'.<sup>104</sup> In assessing the guilt of a wet dream we are advised to consider what prompted it. For, as 'the case of the first sin' shows, 'there are three ways in which all sin is accomplished': through suggestion of the devil (the serpent), which implies no guilt on man's part; through delight of the flesh (Eve), which implies partial guilt; and through consent of the spirit (Adam), which implies total guilt. Therefore, 'if the illusion arises in the soul of the sleeper from foul cogitation while he was awake, the mind's guilt is patent to itself'. When the occurrence is due to the flesh being pampered by a surfeit of food, there is 'some guilt', but when it results 'from superfluity or infirmity of nature' there is none.<sup>105</sup>

104. Ep. XI, lxiv (answer to sixth question). Some contemporaries considered this judgment to be surprisingly lax. Felix, the bishop of Massana (now Messina) in Sicily, informed Gregory that tradition maintained the prohibition 'down to the seventh degree of descent' (Ep. XIV, 16). In reply, Gregory states that he permitted marriages in the third or fourth degree to the English because they 'are still neophytes' and so weak in faith. He also disavows any intention 'to destroy what those who came before me established' (Ep. XIV, 17). The tradition did eventually become fixed in the form that Felix describes. The burden of the rule was felt chiefly by the lower classes, especially the serfs, who had little opportunity to find a spouse beyond the lord's domain. In response to popular demand, Pope Innocent III reduced the prohibition to the fourth degree in A.D. 1215.

105. Ep. XI, lxiv (answer to eleventh question). On the sources of sin, cf. Lib. Reg. Past, III, xxix. In Pastoral Care, op. cit. p. 266, note 305, Davis points out that, in his Moralia, 'Gregory adds a fourth element in sin, namely, a proud contumacy by which a man seeks to justify his sinful act'.

Gregory's letter to Augustine also betrays a tendency to place sex under a taboo. Women who refuse to receive the Eucharist during menstruation are commended and men are warned not to enter a church if they have recently had sexual intercourse with their wives. In explaining the latter injunction, Gregory makes a significant alteration to the Augustinian doctrine of original sin. The pleasure which accompanies 'the lawful intercourse of the wedded' is not only sinful; it is the cause of infants being 'born in sin'.<sup>106</sup> Thus the ascetic flight from worldly pleasures now invades the most private sphere of worldly life.

The basis of monastic power in medieval society was not merely spiritual or moral. Benedict's Rule sought to combat idleness, 'the enemy of the soul', by emphasizing the value of labour<sup>107</sup> and in so doing, it not only reinforced the independence of the monasteries, but helped them to achieve economic power. This, of course, created new problems. Men were attracted to the monastic life by reason of its security instead of its opportunity for spiritual progress, and the wealth of the monastery provided a new excuse for indolence within its walls.<sup>108</sup> However, neither these considerations nor the brutish character of social life can adequately explain the monasteries' failure to ameliorate the conditions under which medieval man had to

106. Ep. XI, lxiv (answer to tenth question).

107. Rule, 48.

108. cf. G.G. Coulton, Five Centuries Of Religion, vol. I, St. Bernard, His Predecessors And Successors, 1000-1200 A.D., C.U.P., 1923, pp. 251-256, 274-280, 319f., 386-397; and G.G. Coulton, The Medieval Village, C.U.P., 1925, pp. 258ff..

live. Apart from the fact that the monks enjoyed their privileged social position and, therefore, possessed little desire for change, they had inherited a theology which assigned minimal significance to the temporal affairs of man. The monasteries were able to provide efficient administrators such as Gregory, but they were ill-prepared for the task of social reconstruction. Even during the Carolingian renaissance, ethics continued to aim at inculcating the narrow ideal of the monk.

The faithful are taught that sexual activity, the paradigm of life according to the flesh, is fundamentally opposed to the life of the Spirit. In one of his sermons, Rabanus Maurus of Mainz<sup>109</sup> exhorts his hearers to imitate the Magi in presenting three-fold gifts to God. He suggests five sets of gifts and the first four respectively include 'mortification of the flesh', 'consecration of the flesh', 'chastity of the body', and 'continence'.<sup>110</sup> For, as he says in another sermon, we should 'cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the flesh, so that we may merit and receive the Holy Spirit'.<sup>111</sup> Theodulph of Orleans<sup>112</sup> prescribes the following Lenten practice: 'One should

109. A.D. 776(?)–868. Educated in the Benedictine monastery at Fulda and, under Alcuin of York (v. inf., note 117) at Tours. Became abbot of Fulda in 822 and archbishop of Mainz in 842.

110. Sermon VII (On The Lord's Epiphany).

111. Sermon XXII (On The Day Of Pentecost).

112. A.D. (mid-eighth century) –921. Abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Fleury-sur-Loire; joined the court of Charlemagne about 794; and became bishop of Orleans about 798.

abstain from wives on these most consecrated days, and live chastely and piously, so that these holy days may be passed with heart and body made holy, and so arrive at the holy day of Pascha, because fasting is of little value if defiled by the marital act, and what prayers, vigils, and alms do not recommend'.<sup>113</sup> He tells the priests that their congregations 'must be admonished to approach the most sacred and holy sacrament of the Lord's body and blood with no delay and never to refrain from it, but with all diligence to choose a time when, for a little, they abstain from the marital act and cleanse themselves from vices, adorn themselves with virtues, be continually in almsgiving and prayers, and so approach so great a sacrament'.<sup>114</sup>

If sex is taboo at specified times and places, so, too, is woman. Theodulph warns that women must not be allowed to approach the altar when Mass is being celebrated. 'For women ought to be mindful of their weakness and of the infirmity of their sex, and therefore fear to touch anything holy in the ministry of the church'.<sup>115</sup> The aura of mystery with which sex and the female were thus surrounded was to be

113. Capitula ad Presbyteros Parochiae Suae, xliii.

114. Ibid, xliv.

115. Ibid, vi.

complemented by the cult of the courtly lady in later medieval literature and society.<sup>116</sup> This new form of devotion involved a provocative reversal of the lowly status which feudal church and society, with their stern conception of lordship, allotted to woman.

Gregory's successors maintained his attempt to impress the monastic ideal upon the clergy. Alcuin of York<sup>117</sup> directs attention to the importance of episcopal holiness in his commentary on Titus.<sup>118</sup> In this letter, Alcuin admits, a bishop is allowed 'a respectable marriage', which means that he must not be 'befouled with wandering lust'.<sup>119</sup> However, Alcuin's intention becomes clear when, on the basis of Titus, 1:8, he argues: 'If laymen are ordered on account of prayer to refrain from intercourse with their wives, what should be thought of the bishop who is to offer spotless sacrifices of holy prayers daily for his own sins and those of the people?' Therefore, the bishop should be 'abstinent . . . in carnal desire',<sup>120</sup> and the priest should follow his example in order 'that the mind that is to make the body of Christ be free from unlawful touch and thought of error'.<sup>121</sup>

116. This statement does not intend to beg the question of the origin of the courtly literature (v. inf. pp. 333 ff). It merely suggests that conditions favoured the appearance of an ideal such as that contained in troubadour poetry and medieval romance.

117. A.D. 735 (?) - 804. Attended the Cathedral School of York and later became the city's first archbishop. Directed the palace school established by Charlemagne at the French court. Became abbot of the monastery of St. Martin at Tours in 794, where his pupils included Rabanus Maurus and Theodulph.

118. This commentary depends heavily upon the corresponding work of Jerome.

119. Commentary on the Epistle to Titus, 1:6.

120. Ibid, 1:9.

121. Ibid, 1:8.

Theodulph of Orleans was deeply concerned to establish priestly purity. He not only forbids 'a presbyter' to live with a woman 'in a single house', but extends the prohibition to female relatives. For they may invite 'other women not at all related to him and offer an enticement for sin to him'.<sup>122</sup> While such orders suggest that the state of the parish clergy during the early medieval period was rather unimpressive, they also begin the process by which the church was eventually to achieve great authority in the affairs of men. For they serve to provide the church with a measure of the economic and moral independence from which the power of the monasteries was derived.

The monastic movement bears ample witness to the power of man's existential concern as an ethical determinant and, in this respect, would appear to suggest that the more intellectual pursuit of theology is relatively unimportant. Monasticism thus forms a fitting conclusion to the work of patristic theologians who had endeavoured to settle the question of Christian identity. From our enquiry into patristic and early medieval ethics, however, it would be rash to infer that theology is a means by which ethical views are rationalized rather than created. Indeed, monastic suspicion of speculative

122. Cap. ad Pres. Paroch. Suac, xii. He admits that he is extending 'the canons'. These will have been based on Canon 3 of the Council of Nicaea and another of the Synod of Elvira (v. L.C.C., vol. IX, Early Medieval Theology, trans. and ed. by G.E. McCracken in collaboration with A. Cabaniss, S.C.M., London, 1957, p. 385, note 29).

activity might imply the contrary. For our examination of patristic theology has shown that new ideas, such as those of the neo-Platonists, can at least reinforce current ethical attitudes and that in some cases, such as Augustine's development of the doctrine of original sin, this effect was fully intended. Furthermore, although Augustine failed to elicit all the ethical implications of divine grace, his reaffirmation of this principle aroused opposition largely because it contradicted certain ethical ideas of his age. These considerations suggest that the limited ethical relevance of theology during the patristic and early medieval periods may have been due to a peculiar set of circumstances. Had Christians felt less threatened by their environment and, therefore, less concerned with maintaining their identity, the ethical impact of theology might have been greater.

With the growth of monasticism, the principal features of Christian identity became established and a slow but unrelenting struggle for the mind of Western man commenced. As educators of the clergy and the laity, the monks prepared the ground on which the imposing edifice of medieval catholicism would be built. Before construction could begin, however, theology and ethics had to acquire a genuine regard for the finite interests of man. This required a recovery of confidence in man's creative potential as well as a willingness to modify an important aspect of the monastic theological tradition. The change of direction is announced in the work of Anselm of Canterbury.

**THEOLOGY AND THE ETHICS OF SEX**

**A study of Patristic and  
Medieval Writings**

**vol. II**

**by**

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**Submitted for**

**The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)**

**to**

**The University of Glasgow**

**in 1971.**



**PART TWO**

**ETHICS AND THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN SOCIETY**

## A. THE REFORMULATION OF THE TRADITION.

-4-

### ETHICS AS JUSTICE: Anselm of Canterbury.

The medieval church began to assert its independence of secular authority when Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) initiated an attempt to deprive lay rulers of the right to make ecclesiastical appointments. One of the champions of the papal cause was Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 until his death in 1109. As a result of his opposition to lay investiture, Anselm was constantly in conflict with the royal court. He was forced to spend the latter years of William Rufus' reign in exile and, though he was recalled soon after the accession of Henry I in 1100, the dispute continued. Anselm's tenure of office was again interrupted, but a compromise was reached in 1106, enabling him to resume his duties. The controversy was not finally settled until the martyrdom of Becket in 1170 led to the submission of Henry II and the royal party.

Prior to his term as archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm was abbot of the Norman monastery at Bec. He had entered this monastery in 1059, at the age of 26, and all of his major theological works were written there. Whereas his later political activity reflects the growing self-assurance of the medieval church, his theology reveals some of the elements in the changing situation. One of the outstanding features of Anselm's theological writings is a confidence in the power of human reason, which represents a manifest departure from the monastic tradition. At the beginning of the Proslogion, the work in which Anselm expounds his celebrated ontological argument for the existence of God, he writes: 'I acknowledge O Lord, with thanksgiving, that thou hast created this thy image in me, so that, remembering thee, I may think of thee, may love

thee . . . I am not trying, O Lord, to penetrate thy loftiness, for I cannot begin to match my understanding with it, but I desire in some measure to understand thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand.<sup>1</sup> The same distinction between judgments whose basis is faith and those which arise from reason, appears in his work on the Atonement, Cur Deus Homo, where it is expressed in terms of the difference between arguments which are merely 'fitting' and those which are 'necessary'.<sup>2</sup>

Although this respect for the rational dimension of human nature paved the way for the development of scholastic theology, the manner in which Anselm employs reason is no more than a rudimentary anticipation of the method which was adopted by the immediate predecessors of Thomas Aquinas. Anselm does display a predilection for dialectic, especially in works where the questions of an interlocuter determine the scope of the enquiry,<sup>3</sup> but the rigour with which thirteenth century theologians applied this procedure is not anticipated. The work of refining the dialectical method was left to later theologians.

Another notable feature of Anselm's theology is its sensitive reappraisal of man's existential situation. One contemporary historian has gone so far as to suggest that the title of Anselm's treatise on the

1. Proslogion, i. Of course, this statement also indicates an appreciation of the distance which separates God from the rational soul. This will introduce ambiguity into Anselm's conception of justice as conformity to the will of God. v. inf.p.233ff and note 80.
2. v. e.g. Cur Deus Homo, I, iii f., x - xii.
3. e.g. Proslogion and Cur Deus Homo.

Atonement, which presupposes that the human condition determines the direction of theological enquiry (*cur deus homo*), foreshadows the 'humanism' of the twelfth century.<sup>4</sup> This claim will appear less exaggerated after we have examined the significance of the concept of justice in the thought of Anselm.

In book I of *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm equates God with 'the highest justice'<sup>5</sup> and, while this may not be his last word on the nature of God,<sup>6</sup> it does express his view of the ultimate norm of human behaviour. Man was created rational 'for the very purpose of distinguishing the just from the unjust' and, on the basis of this discernment, that he 'might hate and shun evil, and love and choose the good - and love and choose the greater good most of all'.<sup>7</sup> Anselm cannot conceive rationality or human nature apart from the ethical demand. To be a man means being a 'debtor to justice'.<sup>8</sup>

In the medieval debate on the status of universals Anselm defended a position of extreme realism. Universal terms, he thought, were not linguistic devices for describing common qualities nor was the 'reality' they described tied to their appearance in particulars. They represent the primary realities in which existential subjects participate to varying

4. F. Heer, *The Medieval World, Europe 1100-1350*, (History of Civilization series), trans. by J. Sondheimer, Weidenfeld And Nicholson, London, 1962, p. 79. Heer uses the term 'humanism' to refer not only to the growing interest in man's temporal prospects, but to the 'open' character of society in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (Ibid, p. 1). Men were willing to experiment with new ideas (Ibid, pp. 74 ff.).

5. *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xiii.

6. J. McIntyre, *St. Anselm And His Critics*, Oliver And Boyd, Edinburgh, 1954, pp. 100f., 199ff. suggests that Anselm implicitly matches God's justice with his love. cf. inf., pp. 231f. and note 76.

7. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, i.

8. *De Conceptu Virginali et De Peccato Originali*, iii.

degrees. Hence, 'nothing, whether substance or action or anything else, is just, considered in itself, save justice'.<sup>9</sup> However, the justice to which man must conform is saved from being a nebulous abstraction, not only by an elaboration of its specific requirements for human behaviour, but by its identification with the will of God. As such, it is not just the law of God, 'the justice which the law orders' and which 'comes from God'.<sup>10</sup> Since it is an aspect of God's nature, justice constitutes the mode of a man's personal relationship with God and ceases to be merely a set of commands to which he must submit. The will or inner man can rejoice in the law of God and this reveals that God's law has become the 'law of the mind'.<sup>11</sup> Anselm defines this state of conformity with divine justice as 'the rectitude of the will maintained for its own sake'.<sup>12</sup>

From his conception of justice, Anselm's view of sin follows directly. It is simply 'the absence of justice . . . when justice ought to be present'.<sup>13</sup> In other words, injustice is a potential quality of the rational nature which alone possesses the freedom and responsibility to conform to divine justice. Injustice means that the will of man has become disordered and that due honour has not been rendered to God.<sup>14</sup> It is a term which emphasizes the temporal implications as well as the eternal consequences of man's relationship to God.

Anselm endeavours to show that human actions derive their ethical significance from the will. He states that 'an action is called unjust not in itself, but on account of an unjust will'. For this reason an act which is usually unjust 'can sometimes be done without injustice - for

9. Ibid, iv.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, referring to Romans 7:23.

12 De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., iii.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid, vi; Cur Deus Homo, I, xi.

instance, to kill a man, as Phinehas did, or to have sexual intercourse, as in marriage or among brute animals'.<sup>15</sup> These two cases of legitimate sexual activity hardly illustrate the ethical primacy of the will. Since the behaviour of animals does not issue from a rational nature, it is irrelevant to Anselm's argument. The restriction of sexual intercourse to the marital situation suggests that the will should forgo its role as the factor which discriminates between acts whose outward appearance is similar and submit to an independent definition of its proper direction. The restriction also suggests that, in the case of sexual behaviour at least, moral distinctions can be identified with social norms. Anselm assumes that a man of good will could never contravene the provisions which society makes for sexual activity. As this presupposition suggests, Anselm was scarcely prepared to challenge traditional estimates of human behaviour. This conservative element in his ethical thought explains why he was unable to produce convincing examples of the manner in which the will determines the value of human actions.

In order to demonstrate that the will is responsible for 'those actions that can never be done justly, such as perjury, and certain other things that should not be named', Anselm introduces theological and psychological considerations. If the moral fault of such actions did not depend upon the will, he argues, sin would disappear as soon as the unjust act was completed and God's redemptive work in Christ would not be necessary. Alternatively, if the effect of an action was intrinsically unjust, sin would acquire a degree of permanence and the purpose of God's work in Christ would be frustrated. Anselm's final argument is based on an idealistic psychology of human acts. In the order of creation 'the members and senses'

15. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., iv.

are merely 'instruments' of the will. 'Whatever they do, therefore, is to be attributed totally to the will'.<sup>16</sup> This concluding statement helps to clarify the tension which we have discovered in Anselm's concept of justice. Since the will bears responsibility for human acts, it is the seat of justice. However, since this responsibility is total, man's actions represent the will with an accuracy which enables justice to be specified in terms of laws which govern those actions. Consequently, the dynamic character which justice may derive from its inherence in the will is compromised by the immobility of a set of regulations. The development of new patterns of justice is hindered by satisfaction with the established content of the law.

On the basis of his conception of justice, Anselm constructs a theory of original sin which decisively rejects the views of Augustine and Gregory the Great. According to Anselm, original sin must be a form of injustice, otherwise it would not be termed sin. Like other forms of injustice, therefore, original sin must be a property of the rational part of human nature. Hence Anselm states: 'I do not think that we can ascribe it to the infant in any way, before it has a rational soul, any more than we could say that justice was in Adam before he became a rational man'.<sup>17</sup> From this

16. Ibid. Earlier in the same work Anselm suggests that, as a result of the Fall, the soul has been subjected to the 'carnal affections' of the body (Ibid, ii). This does not contradict his argument concerning the ethical primacy of the will because the will is itself responsible for its subjection to the body (v. inf. pp.218f.). Since original sin has reduced the autonomy of the will, however, Anselm's psychology of human acts is rendered extremely artificial.

17. De Concep. Virg., et De Pecc. Orig., iii.

point of view, Augustine's attempt to equate original sin with concupiscence appears illegitimate. For Augustine had argued that lust infects the will of man as a result of the disordered state of the body, the non-rational source of human activity. Although Anselm admits that the soul is affected by 'the corruption of the body', he regards this unhealthy influence as an effect of the debility of the will which is the essence of original sin.<sup>18</sup>

In accordance with his view of justice, Anselm also rejects the traditional explanations of the transmission of original sin. Since the effect of a sinful action cannot be intrinsically unjust, neither concupiscence nor pleasure causes children, the products of an act of sexual intercourse, to participate in the fallen condition of mankind. Of course, Anselm denies that the act of sexual intercourse is necessarily sinful. If it is performed within the marital state, it is perfectly just.<sup>19</sup> However, 'even if an infant is begotten by corrupt concupiscence', he writes, 'there is no more fault in the seed than there is in spittle or blood, if a man spits or throws out some of his blood with an evil will. For the evil will is censured, and not the spittle or blood. It is clear then, how there is no sin in infants in the very instant of their conception'.<sup>20</sup> This statement reveals that concupiscence operates as a neutral term in Anselm's ethical vocabulary. It is not morally impugned, 'corrupt', unless it is

18. Ibid, ii.

19. Ibid, iv.

20. Ibid, vii. The reference to 'fault in the seed' reflects a version of the Augustinian theory of original sin which will appear in the work of Hugh of St. Victor, v. inf. pp.295 ff. and note 46 on p. 297.



desire which has been activated by an evil will.

As a means of establishing that his alternative to the traditional account of original sin is legitimate, Anselm reinterprets two Biblical texts, Job 14:4 and Psalm 50:7, which were frequently used in order to prove that original sin is directly connected with sexual activity. 'If I can', he states, 'I shall ask how, although sin is not in infants from the very moment of their conception, they may be said to be conceived from unclean seed, in iniquities and in sins'.<sup>21</sup> This method of refuting one's critics reveals the importance which medieval theology attached to Scripture. It also indicates the manner in which the sacred writings were interpreted. Particular statements in the Biblical text were isolated and the aim of the exposition was to extract their implications for as many as three general areas of Christian doctrine. Of the various meanings which the text therefore possessed, the most important were the allegorical, which related to Christology and ecclesiology, and the tropological, which related to ethics.<sup>22</sup> While the former embodies the emphasis which patristic theologians placed upon the 'spiritual' meaning of Scripture, the latter represents the interest which monastic theologians expressed in the moral life of the individual.

With regard to the texts which were supposed to bear upon the doctrine of original sin, Anselm suggests that 'Scripture often asserts that something is when it is not, simply because it is certain to come about. . . In the same way, we can understand that man is conceived of unclean seed,

21. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., vii.

22. The text might also possess an anagogical meaning. This related to 'eschatology' or the life of Paradise. The literal, or historical, meaning of the text was not overlooked, but it was usually considered to be unimportant.

in iniquities and sins; not that there is any uncleanness of sin or sin or iniquity in the seed, but because from the very seed and the very conception by which he begins to be a man he derives the necessity of having the uncleanness of sin - which is the same thing as sin and iniquity - as soon as he has a rational soul'.<sup>23</sup> In this argument, Anselm draws attention to the manner in which the relevant Biblical statements are made. In view of their literary form, he claims, they cannot be interpreted as arguments for a specific doctrine. For, however we may classify them, these statements are not products of cool, reflective reason.

Nevertheless, Anselm presents this argument as if it supported his particular version of the doctrine of original sin. Had he been less anxious to score a polemical point, he might have developed his remarks concerning the literary form of the Biblical statements and realized that the idea of man's bondage to evil is the apprehension of a mystery rather than the solution to a problem. For these statements are poetic expressions of the insights of sensitive men. Since they are concerned with the common destiny of mankind, their reference to the process of birth as Anselm began to perceive, is hardly surprising. For procreation is the means by which the life of the individual is constituted and the continuation of the species is guaranteed. The reference to this 'ground of being

23. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., vii.

serves to heighten the dramatic effect of the statement and thus reinforces the claim of the intuition upon the mind of the hearer. We may compare the statement that a man possesses the qualities of a king with the claim that he is born to be king. The latter makes the greater impact because it suggests that the destiny of the individual is shaped by forces which spring from a hidden, pre-historical source of human being. The Biblical statements about the power of evil make a similar attempt to extend the limits of man's awareness. They urge him to recognize that evil is a fundamental category of existence. Since man participates in the destiny of which he is aware, this implies that his reason cannot fully comprehend the problem of evil.

When he elaborates the nature of original sin, or the manner in which it affects man's existential condition, Anselm continues to stress the dynamics of the will. Sin is said to be in infants from the moment of conception, he states, 'because they contract in the seed the necessity of sinning, as soon as they are men'.<sup>24</sup> Anselm never suggests that natural man, that is, man unassisted by God's grace, must always sin. He shared the monastic view, which Cassian had formulated, that man is destined from birth to be susceptible to sin in such a way that he surely will sin even if he will not always do so. By nature he does not possess that conformity to divine justice, or rectitude of will maintained for its own sake, which is the condition of authentic existence. He is born into a condition of

24. Ibid.

estrangement - from God, from justice and, since these determine his true destiny, from himself - which is the necessitating ground of future sin. At the historical or existential level, then, Anselm's conception of sin is truly dynamic. Although he would doubtless reckon that one aspect of sin is failure to obey the law which 'comes from God',<sup>25</sup> he realizes that this failure is due to a disturbance in the very heart of the personality. Since man's rational nature or will, his supreme natural endowment according to Anselm,<sup>26</sup> is misdirected, the whole person (totus homo) has lost his true life-orientation.<sup>27</sup> Man's essence is distorted in and by his existence.

In historical terms then, original sin means that man's future is qualified by his present. He is bound to sin because his will is already ill-directed. From the theological perspective man, apart from grace, can look forward to nothing new in history. If we were to say in one word what Anselm means by original sin, we should describe it as guilt, the present awareness of sin which is the condition of future sin. But guilt qualifies the past as well as the future. This raises the question how sin enters into history. In other words, if guilt is the category of existence which explains how sin operates within history - by limiting man's future - what is the explanation of the presence of this category of existence? For Anselm the responsibility for introducing evil

25. Ibid, iv.

26. v. esp. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, i.

27. v. esp. *De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig.*, ii; *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xviii.

into history rests wholly with man. Of Adam and Eve he says that 'since they sinned personally, even though being originally strong and uncorrupted, they had the power of always keeping justice without difficulty, all that they were was enfeebled and corrupted'.<sup>28</sup> We have already noted the 'material' aspect of the corruption of human nature consequent upon that primal sin, namely the disorientation of man's will which is the concomitant of guilt. The cause of guilt lies in the primal act of disobedience through which mankind contracted an irredeemable debt to God. This is the 'formal' aspect of Anselm's thought concerning original sin. Mankind is bound to make recompense or satisfaction to God for the violation of his honour in that first sin.<sup>29</sup> However, fallen man is incapable of redeeming this debt because, even if he were to maintain perfect obedience to God's will (which he cannot), he would only be paying God the debt which he already owed, quite apart from the additional debt brought about by sin.<sup>30</sup>

So far, we have discerned two aspects of Anselm's view of original sin - inability either to 'recover abandoned justice' or to 'make satisfaction for sin'.<sup>31</sup> The former, material aspect explains how guilt influences the

28. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., ii

29. Cur Deus Homo, I, xi-xiii; De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., ii.

30. Cur Deus Homo, I, xx. Anselm lists further reasons for man's inability to make amends to God for the violation of his honour. He states that 'when someone pays back what he unjustly took away, he ought to give something that could not be required of him if he had not stolen another's property'. (Ibid, I, xi). Since nothing in creation could justify the slightest act of disobedience to God, man should offer God something greater than the world. This, of course, is impossible (Ibid, I, xxi). Furthermore, by freely submitting to the persuasion of the devil, man has sacrificed the possibility of overcoming the devil. Yet this is what God requires of man (I, xxii). Although these arguments now seem artificial, they do indicate that Anselm was keenly aware of the gravity of sin.

31. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., ii.

history of individuals while the latter, formal aspect explains how guilt enters into that history. In the De Conceptu Virginali Anselm directs attention to a third aspect of original sin which, at most, is only latent in the Cur Deus Homo. This additional element in original sin is the effect which it has on the body which, after sin, is 'like the bodies of brute animals, subject to corruption and carnal appetites'.<sup>32</sup> This consequence of man's initial act of disobedience forms part of original sin because it contributes to the derangement of the human will. 'The soul was weakened', Anselm states, 'because from the corruption of the body and from those appetites, as well as from the want of the goods it lost, it was tainted by carnal affections'.<sup>33</sup> Without sacrificing the ethical primacy of the soul, then, Anselm defers to theological tradition by agreeing with Augustine that weakness in the rational nature is not the only factor in man's bondage to evil. However, this admission does jeopardize his notion of the ethical neutrality of the body and its appetites.<sup>34</sup> If these are subject to the influence of original sin, it cannot be said that 'the appetites themselves . . . are neither just nor unjust, considered in themselves'. If 'they do not make a man just or unjust simply because he feels them, but make him unjust only if he voluntarily consents to them when he should not', they are not

32. Ibid, cf. Cur Deus Homo, I, ix; II, ii, where Anselm states that death is the result of sin, i.e., the punishment which God inflicts upon the sinner.

33. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., ii. (my italics).

34. v. sup. pp. 210f, and note 16; cf. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., iv (from which the following two quotations are taken).

responsible for the 'carnal affections' of the soul. The inconsistency which bedevils Anselm's discussion of the body's ethical status is a product of his faithfulness to the monastic tradition which, on the one hand, inculcated respect for the views of the Fathers and, on the other hand, promoted confidence in the autonomous will of man.

Anselm's account of the transmission of original sin, or explanation of mankind's solidarity in sin, shows even less deference to the views of Augustine than his analysis of the character of original sin. After referring to the body's subjection 'to corruption and carnal appetites' and to the taint of 'carnal affections' which this helps to produce in the soul, Anselm proceeds to explain how this catastrophe applies to the descendants of Adam and Eve. 'And since the whole of human nature was in Adam and Eve, and nothing belonging to it was outside them, it was weakened and corrupted as a whole'.<sup>35</sup> This argument, which also appears in Cur Deus Homo,<sup>36</sup> is an application of the view that the particular members of a class derive their reality from the universal to which their common term refers. A man participates in original sin simply because he is an instance of fallen humanity.

Since Anselm's 'ultra-realism on the problem of universals allowed him to see universal human nature existing in Adam,'<sup>37</sup> he might have dispensed with discussion of the means by which original sin is communicated from

35. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., ii.

36. Cur Deus Homo, I, xviii.

37. T.C. O'Brien (ed.) in St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 26 - Original Sin, Blackfriars, 1965, p. 128. With this comment O'Brien dismisses Anselm's discussion of the transmission of original sin and thus suggests that Anselm contributed little or nothing to the medieval debate on this subject. O'Brien makes this rash judgment because he wants to defend the solutions which Thomas Aquinas offers to the problems which arise in connection with the doctrine of original sin. cf. further inf. pp. 473 ff.

one generation to the next. He realized, however, that the historicity of man seems to call the idea of mankind's natural solidarity in question. For a person is not a static kind of being. Through his will he can influence his own direction in life and, in so doing, he affects the course taken by others. Can the essential unity of mankind be affirmed in spite of this autonomy of the individual? In reply to this question, Anselm makes use of the notion of 'seminal principles' (λογικοι σπερματικοι) which Augustine had employed in order to explain the fulness of God's act of creation. When new things emerge in the course of history, Augustine argued, they spring from the 'seeds' which the Creator sowed during his initial activity.<sup>38</sup> For this reason, Anselm claims, 'it cannot be denied that infants were in Adam when he sinned. But they were in him causally or materially, as though in his seed, while they are personally in themselves, because in him they were the seed itself, while in themselves each is a different person. In him they were not distinct from himself; in themselves they are other than he'.<sup>39</sup>

From this account of man's unity in history, it follows that original sin, like other components of human nature, is communicated from one generation to the next by means of procreation. This explains why the Virgin Birth was necessary. With one exception, all men inherit original sin because they were in Adam 'in such a way that they came from him by natural propagation which was subject to his power and will; but Christ

38. v. e.g. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, XIII, xiii; *De Pecc. Merit. et Remis.* III, xiv.

39. *De Concept. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig.*, xxiii.



alone was not in him in such a way as to be made of him by nature or will'.<sup>40</sup>

Because he considered that the transmission of original sin was a natural process,<sup>41</sup> Anselm was forced to reduce the gravity of this form of injustice. Between the sin of Adam and the consequent sin of his descendants 'there is a great difference'. For 'he sinned by his own will, but they sin by natural necessity, merited by his own personal will. But although no one doubts that unequal sins are not followed by equal punishment, the condemnation of personal and original sin is alike in this respect, that no one is admitted to the Kingdom of God, for which man was made, save by the death of Christ - apart from which, what is due for Adam's sin is not repaid - even if all are not equally deserving of torment in hell'.<sup>42</sup> In suggesting that there is sin 'by natural necessity' Anselm undermines his thesis that injustice is a quality of the will and culpable. This suggestion also establishes a hiatus between original sin and personal sin and thus jeopardizes his view that guilt is the source of future acts of sin. On his own terms, then, Anselm's account of the manner in which original sin applies to the successors of Adam is most unsatisfactory.

Anselm described original sin in such a way that an explanation of its transmission was necessary but impossible. Since original sin qualifies the will of an individual, the means by which he is subjected to its influence must be demonstrated. Yet such means cannot be found.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid, i; xxiii.

42. Ibid, xxiii.

For, like other kinds of injustice, original sin is merely a deficiency in the rational creature. It therefore possesses no intrinsic reality. It derives a nominal reality from its inherence in an existing person but, in itself, original sin 'is absolutely nothing'.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the will, which is the seat of injustice, offers the only means of transferring original sin from one person to another. However, Anselm was unable to accept this conclusion because he believed that a man receives his rational soul, not from his parents, but from God.<sup>44</sup>

Although Anselm presents a novel theory of original sin, the principles on which it is based are in complete accordance with the monastic attitude to the Christian life. Indeed, his theology may be interpreted as an attempt to clarify and elaborate the presuppositions of monastic thought. For his analysis of the human condition depends upon a conception of justice which, in its implications for the will, clearly reflects the monastic preoccupation with the moral struggle of the individual. In the light of his affinity with the monastic tradition, we should not expect Anselm to set great store by man's sexual activity. Nevertheless, we shall discover that the responsibility which he assigned to the individual will, allowed him to moderate the views of his predecessors.

43. Ibid, v.

44. Hence the infant does not participate in original sin 'from the very instant of its conception'. It does so 'as soon as (it) has a rational soul' (De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., vii; cf. iii; xxvii).

Anselm accepted Augustine's view of the goal of creaturely existence. 'The rational nature . . . was created just, so that it might be blessed in the enjoyment of the highest good, that is, God'.<sup>45</sup> God is not only the 'highest justice'.<sup>46</sup> He is the *Summum Bonum*, the enjoyment of which fulfils the life of man. Because he posits such a close connection between the Right and the Good, Anselm nowhere suggests, as the early Augustine had done, that man can begin to transcend the life of duty in history. For him the complacent, contemplative life in the vision of God is always beyond historical existence. The latter is the area of practical obligation. Historical man is always a 'debtor to justice'.<sup>47</sup> Since, however, life in history achieves significance only by being the preparation for a better, true life in the supra-historical Kingdom of God, Anselm is wary of any quality or mode of historical existence which might distract man from pursuit of his true goal.

This explains his cautious approach to the question of worldly pleasure. Here his thought is more typical of monastic theology. Such pleasure is dangerous, he says, precisely because it draws man away from the pursuit of his true destiny, the blessedness which attends those who obey God in love. 'With this in mind, you must flee from repose and worldly pleasures which hold back the mind from the true repose and pleasure in so far as you know that they support your purpose of attaining that end.'<sup>48</sup> In the saving clause, Anselm introduces a note of genuine

45. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, i.

46. *Ibid*, I, xiii.

47. *De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig.*, iii.; cf. ii; *Cur Deus Homo.*, I, xi.

48. *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xx.

moderation into the monastic treatment of worldly pleasure. This achievement was facilitated by his conception of sin. If sin is a function of the will, neither pleasurable objects nor feelings of pleasure can be intrinsically evil. By suggesting that worldly pleasure may actually help man to achieve eternal bliss, however, Anselm allows more than his view of sin requires. For this suggestion implies that the man of justice can accommodate himself to the ways of the world. Man's temporal prospects are not as grotesque as the ascetics and early monastics had imagined. Therefore, Anselm was prepared to grant a measure of autonomy to the moral agent. While his general attitude to pleasure is clear, he refuses to specify either the amount or types of pleasure which justice permits. The individual must confine worldly pleasure within limits which he himself has determined.

Although Anselm did adopt a more tolerant attitude to worldly pleasure, his departure from the traditional view should not be exaggerated. Since he placed man's goal beyond history he could agree that a man honours God when, 'for fear and love of him', he abandons 'temporal delight with contrition of heart'.<sup>49</sup> Other considerations served to confirm this point of view. Thus he asks: 'If man sinned through pleasure, is it not fitting for him to make satisfaction through adversity'?

49. Ibid. The words are attributed to Boso, the interlocutor, but Anselm accepts them - a man owes 'God all those things you have mentioned'.

50. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, xi.

When he argues that something is 'fitting' or appropriate, Anselm intends to convince believers only.<sup>51</sup> They also possess the example of Christ's suffering and death in the service of justice to convince them that pleasure derived from worldly sources is of dubious value.<sup>52</sup> However, this does not mean that the just are bound to be miserable. For 'it is no misery to experience some disadvantage of our own free will, prudently and under no compulsion'.<sup>53</sup> Like Christ, then, historical men can derive satisfaction from the service of justice because he knows that this is the means of achieving an eternal reward.

As we have already noticed, Anselm thought that the Fall had created a conflict between the spirit and the flesh of man. Thus, although he rejected Augustine's view of original sin, Anselm agreed that 'the members and senses are punished for the fault of the will'.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, in Cur Deus Homo he tells Boso, the interlocutor, that 'it will not take much effort to show that this man (Christ) will be brought forth more purely and honourably from a man or woman alone than from the union of both'.<sup>55</sup> Such remarks clearly indicate that his theory of original sin

51. v. sup. p. 207, note 2.

52. Cur Deus Homo, II, xi.

53. Ibid, II, xii.

54. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., iv. Anselm immediately adds that 'this does not really happen, for only the will is punished. For only what happens against his will is punishment for anyone'. In other words, it is 'the will' (rational soul), not 'the members and senses' (flesh), which suffers as a result of the conflict.

55. Cur Deus Homo, II, viii.

was not designed to nullify the traditional estimate of sexual relations.

Opposition between the life of the spirit and the life of the flesh undoubtedly lies behind Anselm's statement that 'celibacy is better than marriage'.<sup>56</sup> For, however just marriage may be,<sup>57</sup> it is clearly a form of existence in which pre-occupation with the things of the flesh is a constant danger. Again, however, Anselm's acceptance of the traditional view is moderated by his basic ethical presuppositions. 'Corrupt' concupiscence is a determination of the will not of man's physical or sexual nature. In the case of sexual activity, it can be identified as the refusal to confine sexual intercourse to marriage. There is nothing essentially or necessarily unjust about the act within marriage. Hence neither celibacy nor marriage 'is definitely required from a man' by God.<sup>59</sup> Responsibility for the choice lies solely with the individual and it is no part of the theologian's task to specify what that choice should be.

Anselm derived another argument for celibacy from the role of the will. The religious life is 'more pleasing to God' because it is based upon a vow whereby a man not only renounces 'ordinary life, but even his freedom to live it'.<sup>60</sup> Since his virginity is a free gift, that is, a decision of the will which is not commanded by God, the celibate

56. Ibid, II, xviii.

57. De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig., iv.

58. Ibid.

59. Cur Deus Homo, II, xviii.

60. Ibid, II, v.

'expects a reward' for his self-sacrifice. Of course, marriage is a matter of free choice too. With refreshing candour Anselm tells Boso that if a man 'prefers it, he ought to use marriage.'<sup>61</sup> In contrast with celibacy, however, marriage is not undertaken primarily for the sake of God. While Anselm insists that marriage is an entirely legitimate mode of existence, then, he also points out that celibacy involves greater rectitude of will.

If Anselm's view of original sin and his attitude to marriage constitute a real, though at times covert, break with tradition, his attitude to woman is less novel. In fact, he has very little to say about 'the second sex'<sup>62</sup> but, if this prevents him from dwelling on its infirmities, it also betrays the degree to which theology had become the servant of masculine interests and attitudes. Thus, the choice between celibacy and marriage is presented as an exclusively male concern: 'we do say that a man ought to do what he prefers, before he decides on one or other of these states'.<sup>63</sup> Anselm also lends his support to the view that woman bears the responsibility for the downfall of the human race.

61. Ibid, II, xviii.

62. This phrase is, of course, the title of a work by Simone de Beauvoir. It is not used by Anselm.

63. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, xviii. (Anselm's italics). This manner of presenting the choice reflects its finality. Once the decision has been made it cannot be reconsidered. Anselm's conception of the celibate vow is, of course, derived from the monastic ideal. Institutional celibacy cannot tolerate a conditional vow because that would undermine the stability of the monastery. Hence the value which Anselm attaches to the vow is a logical development of the tradition.

Among the considerations which recommend belief in the Virgin Birth, he mentions the following:- 'since such great evil came from a woman, it is right that such great good should come from a woman, to renew their hope'; and 'if the cause of all evil for the human race was a virgin, it is still more fitting for the cause of all good to be a virgin'.<sup>64</sup> The reference to women in the third person - 'their hope' - is an indication of the cleavage which theology had helped to establish between the sexes. It implies that the destiny of woman is markedly different from that of man. The description of woman's restoration in terms of 'renewed hope' also implies that the Virgin was incapable of ameliorating the present lot of her sex<sup>65</sup>.

Anselm's discussion of Christ's sinlessness in Cur Deus Homo, contains evidence of a remarkable increase in Christian devotion to the Virgin.<sup>66</sup> Acting as the spokesman of popular piety, Boso suggests that the inner logic of the Augustinian theory of original sin demands belief in Mary's immaculate conception. He asks 'how God took manhood without sin from the sinful mass, that is, from the human race which was totally infected by sin, as if he were to take something unleavened from a lump of fermented dough. For even though the conception of this Man is pure and free from the sin of carnal delight, nevertheless the Virgin herself, from whom he was taken, ... was born with original sin, since she also

64. Cur Deus Homo, II, viii.

65. cf. G.G. Coulton, Five Centuries of Religion, vol. I, op.cit. pp.176 ff.

66. cf. Ibid, chapters 9 and 10. In this vivid account of the growth of Marian devotion during the Middle Ages, Coulton shows that theology merely followed the lead of popular piety.



sinned in Adam, "in whom all have sinned".<sup>67</sup> Anselm might have answered this question in terms of his own account of original sin. Christ was born without sin because his birth was the product, not of the will of man, but of the will of God. In order to avoid a lengthy digression on the subject of original sin,<sup>68</sup> however, Anselm simply claims that Mary's antecedent faith in Christ rendered her fit to bear him. She 'was among those who, before his birth, were purified from sins through him, and he was taken from her in this very state of purity'.<sup>69</sup> In opposition to Augustine, then, Anselm asserts that the man of faith is free from the effects, as well as the guilt, of original sin. Hence, Mary did not need to be immaculately conceived.

Although Anselm rejected the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, his Prayer to Saint Mary to Obtain Love for Her and for Christ shows that he regarded her as a worthy object of devotion.<sup>70</sup> The prayer is quite ecstatic. Mary is 'Queen of angels, Mistress of the world', and through her 'the elements are renewed, hell is remedied, demons are trampled on, men are saved, angels are replaced!' Nevertheless, Anselm emphasizes that she derives her merit from her son. She is 'Cause of general reconciliation' only because she is 'Cherisher of the restorer of my flesh, . . . Nurse of the Saviour of my whole being!' On account of this

67. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, xvi.

68. *Ibid.*, II, xvii.

69. *Ibid.*, II, xvi. This suggestion provides a further indication of Anselm's interest in man's historical condition. The benefits of God's redemptive work in Christ apply to men and women throughout history. Hence the believer may view man's temporal prospects with confidence.

70. Unless noted, the quotations in this paragraph and the two following are taken from the prayer.

commendable Christocentricity, the merits of Mary do not accrue to other women, even though they may share the faith which entitled her to bear the God-Man. Instead of transforming the condition of her sisters, the Virgin has escaped it. 'Nothing is equal to Mary, nothing save God is greater than Mary'.

As her exceptional status indicates, devotion to Mary was essentially a masculine concern. Most of the early Marian legends tell of her favour to a particular man or group of men. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the foremost advocates of the cult of Mary were the new religious orders, notably the Cistercian monks and the Franciscan and Dominican friars, who competed with one another for her patronage.<sup>71</sup> Owing to its masculine bias, medieval Christianity failed to make adequate provision for the spiritual needs of women. Consequently, these began to find expression in alternative forms of worship and witchcraft emerged as one of the scourges of Christendom.

From its association with the revival of religious enthusiasm in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we are entitled to infer that devotion to the Virgin supplied a deeply felt need of the human spirit. Like the troubadours who began composing their love-lyrics at the beginning of the twelfth century, the devotees of Mary discovered a means of reaffirming the feminine principle of life. The Virgin was thought to possess a

71. v. G.G. Coulton, op.cit., esp. pp. 142 ff., 162 ff., and Appendix 17, pp. 499 ff.. The Cistercians were a reformed Benedictine order, founded in 1098. The friars were representatives of a new form of religious organization which began with the founding of the Franciscan order in 1209. The Dominicans were founded in 1215.

quality of mercy which was lacking in the Godhead. After bemoaning the goods which he has forfeited through sin, Anselm states: 'I am certain that, as through the Son's grace I could receive them, so through the Mother's merits I can recover the same goods. Therefore', he entreats her, 'see that the pardon of my sins and the grace to live well are granted to me, and that this thy servant is guarded even to the end under thy protection'.

In view of the role which he assigns to Mary, we must reject McIntyre's suggestion that Anselm's account of the Atonement implies that 'love', as well as 'justice', 'is none other than God himself'.<sup>72</sup> According to Anselm, God's mercy is quite different from human kindness or love. Near the end of Cur Deus Homo he tells Boso that 'we have found how great (God's mercy) really is, and how it is in such harmony with his justice that it cannot be conceived to be greater or more just'.<sup>73</sup> For, by repaying the debt to justice which, through the sin of Adam, man himself could never redeem, God's work in Christ revives man's hope of blessedness and so restores the purpose of the moral life. Men 'will be (Christ's) imitators in vain if they do not share in his merit'.<sup>74</sup> If grace is absent, the moral struggle is futile; if it is present, the moral demand, the imitation of Christ, is regenerated. Thus, while we may agree with McIntyre that Cur Deus Homo represents Anselm's 'most

72. J. McIntyre, op. cit., p.101 (referring to Cur Deus Homo, I, xiii).

73. Cur Deus Homo, II, xx.

74. Ibid, II, xix.

mature account of the Nature of God',<sup>75</sup> we cannot agree that this God is something besides 'the highest justice' except that, as such, he is also the *Summum Bonum*. However, only the hypocrite can tolerate life in the presence of a God who is essentially the executor of justice. Hence, instead of modifying his conception of God as McIntyre suggests he should have done, Anselm elevated the merciful lady. In doing so he failed to realize that he had implicitly included her in the Godhead. For, if 'God is greater than Mary', her influence upon his judgement of sinners destroys the aseity or self-determination which Anselm regarded as an essential attribute of God.<sup>76</sup>

God's aseity is manifested in the autonomy and consistency with which he acts. His will is free from both external constraint and inner compulsion - 'he does all that he wills and only what he wills' - but it is not unpredictable - 'since he himself is truth, (he) wills that the truth should be always unchangeable, as it is'.<sup>77</sup> On the one hand, then, God's will is dynamic and, as Anselm's account of the Atonement reveals, it can motivate activity which modifies the conditions of existence. However, such activity is never arbitrary because it arises from a will which always accords with the requirements of justice.

In so far as it conforms to divine justice the will of man shares

75. J. McIntyre, op. cit., p. 204.

76. In an unexpected sense, then, McIntyre is correct when he suggests that Anselm should have emphasized the merciful character of God's grace! For a more detailed discussion of McIntyre's interpretation of *Cur Deus Homo*, v. Appendix, pp. 238-241.

77. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, xvii; cf. II, x.

the quality of aseity.<sup>78</sup> Thus Anselm allows that the will is free to determine some aspects of a just life. The individual must take the responsibility of choosing between celibacy and marriage; he alone can decide how much worldly pleasure he may legitimately enjoy. However, Anselm severely restricts the moral autonomy of the individual will. He claims that various kinds of action, such as perjury and fornication, are invariably the products of an unjust will and, therefore, that they must be absolutely forbidden. This is a plausible argument but, in effect, it deprives the will of its power of discretion. Instead of entering the future with the freedom to create its own pattern of just behaviour, the will must submit to the ethical formulations of the past. In assigning such a passive role to the will Anselm fails to realize that history can give rise to situations which require the will to reappraise traditional moral standards.

Anselm was unable to do justice to the historical character of existence because he regarded justice as part of the structure of reality. Owing to its ontological status, justice can inform the will of man, but reciprocal influence is impossible. Anselm derived his view of the relationship between ethics and ontology from the neo-Platonic scheme.

78. cf. *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xviii - God gave Adam the power to confirm himself in justice. Through the Fall, however, men 'were so weakened that of themselves they could not exist without sin' (my italics). Nevertheless, in his treatise On the Virgin Birth and Original Sin, Anselm states that persons exist 'in themselves'. Therefore, the 'natural' sin which they derive from Adam is not as grievous as the 'personal' sin which he first committed (*De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig.*, xxiii; cf. i). Finally, the Atonement offers man the opportunity of recovering his Adamic 'purity' (*Cur Deus Homo*, II, xvi). This implies that the human race can 'be restored to the dignity it was to have had if Adam had not sinned' and that the faithful can stand 'by themselves, without support from any other creature' (*Cur Deus Homo*, II, viii; my italics).

of Augustine. This identifies the pattern of justice with the God who establishes the structure and goal of reality. The moral imperative is, therefore, a means of inviting man to recognize the essential purpose (telos) of his being. At the beginning of the second book of Cur Deus Homo Anselm tells Boso that man was created rational in order to discern, love, and choose justice and the good. This implies that man was 'made to love and choose the supreme good' (Summum Bonum), which is God himself. Finally, since God's purpose cannot be frustrated, the just man can be assured that he will gain the end which he desires. He will be 'blessed in the enjoyment of the highest good, that is, God'.<sup>79</sup>

In this account of the ethical situation the intellect replaces the will as the primary agent of justice or goodness. When he discerns the structure of reality the man of wisdom discovers the Good which is the final cause of his own destiny. Hence this Good inevitably becomes the object of his desire (eros), and this desire becomes the motive of his ensuing activity. The notion of eros contradicts most of Anselm's statements concerning the ethical significance of the will. Since it is the servant of an irresistible desire, the will cannot assume total responsibility for moral decision. Furthermore, since the just life is motivated by desire for blessedness, justice cannot be defined as 'rectitude of the will maintained for its own sake'. Apart from God, who is self-sufficient, only those who are unaware of the theoretical

79. Cur Deus Homo, II, 1.

foundation of their moral code can do what is right for its own sake.<sup>80</sup>

Anselm's ontology also prevented him from giving a coherent account of the ethical sanction, that is, the penalty which is provided against disobedience or injustice. Without this provision the distinction between justice and injustice loses its force. As Anselm himself states, 'if sin is neither paid for nor punished, it is subject to no law'.<sup>81</sup> He realized, too, that punishment must involve suffering - 'only what happens against his will is punishment for anyone'.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, 'if a sinner does not fully pay what he owes, God takes it from him against his will'.<sup>83</sup> However, this action is also the means by which God protects his universe against disorder. When a man sins 'supreme wisdom redirects the very perversity of his will or action toward the order and beauty of the aforesaid universe'.<sup>84</sup> Now, the man who is ethically mature must know that loss of beatitude is an inevitable consequence of sin. Since he will be 'unwilling' to endure this deprivation,<sup>85</sup> it is difficult to imagine what could induce him to sin. On the other hand, if he should choose to act unjustly, he will be prepared to accept the consequence of his action. God can take nothing from him against his will. Unless the term is used metaphorically, then, a God who guarantees the order of the universe cannot be said to punish those who wittingly

80. In other words, the neo-Platonic ontology undermines Anselm's conception of human justice as conformity to the will of God. For the soul which is separated by space and time from the divine ground of being can be neither complacent nor disinterested in the performance of justice.

81. *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xii.

82. *De Concep. Virg. et De Pecc. Orig.*, iv.

83. *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xiv.

84. *Ibid.*, I, xv.

85. *Ibid.*, I, xiv.

defy him.

According to the Platonic view of the world, man must seek his welfare beyond history. In this setting ethics becomes a delineation of *ἀσκησις*, that is, of a form of penance whereby man rejects the world for the sake of eternity. Hence Anselm encourages man to renounce, 'for God's sake, not only ordinary life, but even his freedom to live it'.<sup>86</sup> The man who is concerned with the welfare of his neighbours is in danger of forfeiting his destiny. Worldly pleasure presents a similar threat. On the other hand, suffering which is endured for the sake of one's goal is ennobling. The essential meaning of world-rejection and suffering is death. Death is the fulfilment of life's passion or *eros*, the door through which man passes from an existence which is estranged from its true purpose to a life of glory which is in harmony with all being.<sup>87</sup> This attitude is implied in Anselm's account of the sufferings and death of Christ, whom believers are required to imitate.<sup>88</sup> Since the resurrection supervenes, his death is no tragedy. However, the resurrection is hardly a triumph over death, rather it is the logical outcome in which the significance of death is revealed.<sup>89</sup>

86. Ibid, II, v.

87. cf. D. de Rougemont, *Passion And Society* (trans. by M. Belgion), Faber & Faber, London, 1962, esp. pp. 42-46, 61-66.

88. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, xi; cf. II, xix.

89. Of course, the theological significance of death is that it is a punishment for sin. cf. *Cur Deus Homo*, II, iif. - God made man just, 'with a view to eternal blessedness. It follows, therefore, that if he had never sinned, man would never have died. From this we can clearly prove the resurrection of the dead at some future time. For if man is to be perfectly restored, he ought to be restored to the condition he was going to be in if he had not sinned' (my italics). This certainly produces, in one form or another, a 'sickness unto death'.



Although the ontological framework of Anselm's thought jeopardizes his account of the will's responsibility for justice, it does provide his ethics with a measure of stability. For it enables him to incorporate most of the traditional features into his portrait of the Christian life. Celibacy and other forms of self-denial continue to represent the pinnacle of Christian achievement. Since Anselm produced his theology against a background of feudal anarchy, it is difficult to quarrel with his attempt to restrict the autonomy of the individual will. Furthermore, this conservative tendency did not prevent him from giving cautious approval to some of the implications of his conception of justice. Thus he was able to suggest that the conditions of historical existence are not the antithesis of the will of God. Similarly, he was able to formulate a theory of original sin in which the disparagement of human sexuality is minimized. Hence he was prepared to allow that marriage and other forms of life in the world do not necessarily imply that the will lacks the rectitude which God requires. In the work of Anselm, then, theological enquiry has produced a modification of ethical views. If the formative influence of his theology seems negligible, that is because the strength of the established pattern of Christian behaviour has been overlooked. As we shall shortly discover, later medieval theologians tended to confirm rather than modify the traditional estimates of man's various activities.

APPENDIXJustice and Mercy in Cur Deus Homo \*

In his interpretation of Cur Deus Homo, John McIntyre exaggerates Anselm's conception of the mercy of God. He does so because he is justifiably concerned to demonstrate that Anselm regarded grace as an essential part of the divine nature (v. pp. 199 ff.). As McIntyre points out, Anselm's view of grace cannot be appreciated unless his notion of God's aseity, or self-determination, has been understood (pp. 161-167). The 'necessity' of man's salvation, that is, the demand for the intervention of the God-Man, does not imply that God is acting under some form of compulsion. God must restore fallen man to his former state because justice, which has its seat in God himself, requires as much. If man failed to reach the blessedness for which he was created, God's 'changeless honour', which is an integral feature of his justice (I, xv), would be impugned (II, v; cf. I, iv; II, i-iv; cf. pp. 62-65). McIntyre also notes that Anselm provides 'what we might call a "secondary ground" for the necessity of salvation' (p. 81). This states that men must replace the fallen angels in 'the Heavenly City' (I, xviii). Since God is pre-eminently just, he cannot redeem man unless recompense, or satisfaction, is made for the affront which he has received from man's sin (I, xi-xiii; I, xix-xxiv; pp. 68-76). In book II Anselm seeks to prove that the God-Man can and does offer the requisite satisfaction (pp. 76-82).

\* Roman numerals refer to Cur Deus Homo, Arabic to J. McIntyre, St. Anselm And His Critics, op. cit.

Within the framework of *Cur Deus Homo*, then, grace is merely a function of justice. In order to show that it should be assigned the same status as justice, therefore, McIntyre has to prove that Anselm's methodology is 'artificial'. Hence he suggests that Anselm should not have postponed discussion of God's redemptive work in Christ until book II, by which time the conception of justice has been allowed to determine the conditions under which God must perform his task. If Anselm had not adopted this approach to his subject, McIntyre claims, he might have agreed with Boso that God's mercy is sufficient reason for the remission of sins (I, xii; p.101). This argument is plausible because, in book II, Anselm does elaborate a view of God's mercy. However, he concludes by saying that God's mercy 'is in such harmony with his justice that it cannot be conceived to be greater or more just' (II, xx). Thus he implicitly reaffirms his rejection of Boso's earlier contention. God cannot forgive sin on the grounds of his kindness alone, because that would fail to ensure that the requirements of justice were fulfilled (I, xxiv). In short, Anselm's reply to Boso does not indicate that his methodology inhibits the effective presentation of his views.

Although he argues that Anselm could have accepted Boso's account of the forgiveness of sins, McIntyre proceeds to moderate his criticism. 'If ... we want to quarrel with Anselm's views on the impossibility of forgiving sins ..., we must concentrate ... upon his theological conception of justice in God' (p. 102). Since it affirms the moral order of the universe and does not ignore the gravity of sin or the need

to make satisfaction for sin, Anselm's view of the nature of God must be respected (pp. 103f.) McIntyre avails himself of further opportunities to applaud the moral seriousness of Anselm's theology (v. esp. p.120). Nevertheless, he insists that Anselm's theme in Cur Deus Homo is 'sola gratia' (p.199) and that God's grace has its roots not only in his justice and freedom (ascity), but equally in his love. For God's love is compromised, McIntyre writes, 'if He has no regard for the final blessedness of those whom He once created' (p.201). Now, Anselm does state that God's mercy consists in the fact that, 'after this life, he makes man blessed' (I, xxiv), but he derives the 'necessity' of beatitude, not from this mercy, but from the unfailing manner in which God pursues his purposes (II, v.) What man apprehends as mercy, then, is essentially a manifestation of God's 'unchanging truth' or 'changeless honour' (II, xx; II, xix; II, v). Since God acts with perfect freedom, the Atonement is 'an outflowing of Divine Grace, unmerited by man' (p.203). However, the merciful character of this act is a product of the divine justice and truth.

Owing to his enthusiasm for Anselm's theory of the Atonement, (v. esp. pp. 186-204), McIntyre overlooks two serious shortcomings of Cur Deus Homo. First, Anselm fails to show how God's grace enables man to be 'purified from sins' (II, xvi). In book I Anselm tells Rose that 'the whole of human nature was conquered for sin' in the parents of the human race (I, xviii). However, his account of God's redemptive work ignores this aspect of the human predicament and concentrates entirely upon the repayment of man's debt to God. Thus he presumes that the man of faith, who has appropriated the satisfaction which Christ offers for sin

can blithely revert to a life of justice. The example of Christ and the teachings of Scripture are adequate guides for the 'man who has shared in the fruits of Christ's work' (II, xi; II, xviii; pp. 185f., 188f).

According to Anselm then, the grace of God does not affect the nature of the just life. Instead of releasing man from concern with his conformity to the will of God, grace revives the moral struggle of the individual. This does not mean that salvation is uncertain. As McIntyre points out, Anselm regards penitence as the means of participating in the forgiveness which the God-Man offers (II, xvi; pp. 176-178, 188). However, Anselm's view of grace leaves no room for the freedom of the Christian man. Salvation is promised but, since the promise must be continually re-appropriated, it does not provide the confidence which enables man to determine his own pattern of behaviour. (cf. Philippians, 2:12f.) If McIntyre had been less impressed by Anselm's conception of justice, he might have noticed that it undermines the moral efficacy of divine grace.

## ETHICS AS INTENTION: Peter Abelard.

The Story of Calamities, an autobiographical letter which Abelard wrote during one of the periodic crises of his life, records the enthusiasm with which many students responded to his critical treatment of theological issues as well as the hostility which his unorthodox opinions aroused in the minds of leading churchmen such as Bernard of Clairvaux.<sup>1</sup> Although Abelard's teaching made a profound impression on his contemporaries, however, his reputation as a theologian has suffered from the widespread conviction that the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas is the definitive exposition of the medieval contribution to Christian thought. For this reason, theologians have rarely attempted to analyse the writings of Abelard<sup>2</sup> and the task of preserving his memory has been left to historians and biographers who have shown a keen interest in

1. Historia Calamitatum, v. esp. chapters ix-xii. In chapter xii Abelard states that his 'former rivals', whom he has already named, encouraged 'certain new apostles' to harass him. Since he was somewhat intimidated by these younger adversaries, he refuses to tell the reader their names, but the one who 'boasted that he had reformed the life . . . of the monks' is clearly Bernard of Clairvaux. With William of Thierry, Bernard led the attack upon Abelard's thought at the Council of Sens in 1140.
2. In A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm To Ockham, The Library Of Christian Classics, vol. x, S.C.M., London, 1956, Eugene R. Fairweather, the editor and translator, suggests that the lack of reliable assessments of Abelard's theological work has been due 'in part to the condemnations aimed at his writings during his lifetime and in part to the ill-informed enthusiasm with which some modern historians have hailed him as a "morning star of the Enlightenment"' (p.224). However, the first consideration hardly explains the continuing lack of interest in Abelard's writings, while the second is a sign, rather than an explanation, of the absence of critical enterprise.

his turbulent career.<sup>3</sup> Since one of his best known 'calamities' was the product of his passionate affair with Heloise,<sup>4</sup> it is rather ironical that we should use the subject of sex in order to pay more serious attention to Abelard the scholar. Of course, a man's thought cannot be separated from his life and, in the course of our enquiry we shall note matters which are relevant to the personal history of Abelard and Heloise. Nevertheless, we shall not attempt to reconstruct that history, especially since unambiguous evidence for many aspects of the episode is wanting.<sup>5</sup> In examining the correspondence of the lovers

3. The shift in the balance of interest in Abelard will have begun soon after the Council of Sens denounced his contentious views. Thus the second part of the Romance Of The Rose, written by Jean de Meun during the latter half of the thirteenth century, contains an account of the problems of Abelard and Heloise (v. The Romance Of The Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, trans. by H.W. Robbins, ed. and intro. by C.W. Dunn, E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, section 42, lines 9-62 - lines 8759-8832 of the standard edition of the original text in Old French: Le Roman de la Rose, ed. Ernest Langlois, Societe des anciens textes francais, Paris, 5 vols., 1914-1924).
4. The couple were introduced by the girl's uncle and guardian who had employed Abelard as her tutor. Enraged by the discovery that his niece had become his employee's lover, the uncle had Abelard castrated by a gang of ruffians.
5. Concerning the problems of interpreting the evidence for this as well as for other aspects of Abelard's life, v. Mary M. McLaughlin, Abelard As Autobiographer: The Motives And Meaning Of His "Story Of Calamities" in Speculum, vol., XLII, no. 3, July, 1967, p.463; and Roger B. Lloyd, The Stricken Lute, Lovat Dickson Ltd., London, 1932, pp. 15ff., 50, 140f., 148.

our primary purpose will be to understand the views of the theologian.<sup>6</sup>

While he did not divorce ethics from theology, Abelard was the first medieval theologian to make a formal distinction between the two disciplines. In 1123 or 1124 he wrote the Christian Theology<sup>7</sup> and, towards the end of the following decade this was complemented by the appearance of the Ethics.<sup>8</sup> Together with his letters, these works form the basis of our investigation into his thought. Many of Abelard's views were condemned at the Council of Sens in 1140 but, in spite of this official censure, his provocative ideas could not be ignored by

6. As this also implies, we do not consider that Heloise comes within the scope of our enquiry. However, we may take this opportunity to record our conviction that, while she is a tragic figure, Heloise is not an interesting character. Her letters show that she possessed a lively mind and that, unlike her beloved, she was loath to accept the separation which had been forced upon them, (v. The Letters Of Abelard And Heloise, trans. by C.K. Scott Moncrieff, London: Guy Chapman, 1925, nos. 2, 4 and 6, pp. 43-49, 61-67, 89-103) Nevertheless, her unwavering devotion to Abelard finally overcame her opposition to his will and she determined to pursue the religious life which he assured her was God's means of rescuing them from their shameful past (v. Letter 5, in op.cit., esp. pp. 77-85) Medieval theologians would have approved of her decision and writers who extol her as a representative of the 'eternal feminine' (e.g. A. Scaglione, Nature And Love In The Middle Ages, University Of California Press, 1963, p.25) should ask themselves whether they have derived their concept of femininity from a less than eternal source. (Although an editor, possibly Abelard himself, may have been responsible for the final form of the letters, their vitality attests to their essential authenticity, cf., J. Huizinga, Men And Ideas, essays trans. by J.S. Holmes and H. van Marle, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, pp. 186f)
7. v. J. Ramsay McCallum, Abelard's Christian Theology, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1948, pp. 24f. This translation of the Theologia Christiana is incomplete. The work is divided into five parts and, in order to make references more precise, I shall add the appropriate column in J-P. Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina, vol. CLXXVlll
8. v. J. Ramsay McCallum, Abailard's Ethics, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1935 pp. 11f. Direct quotations from chapters ix to xiv of this work have been taken from Fairweather's translation in A Scholastic Miscellany, op.cit. For the remainder of the work we have relied upon McCallum's version which, provided that the reader is aware of the translator's bias towards the novel elements in Abelard's thought (cf. McCallum's introduction to the work, pp. 1-6), is not as 'unreliable' as Fairweather suggests v. A Scholastic Miscellany, op.cit., p.234.



later theologians and philosophers. Thomas Aquinas considered that it was necessary to deal with a number of matters discussed by Abelard, notably the possibility of making statements about God, the role of intention in moral behaviour, and the reality of inherited, or original, sin.

#### Abelard's theology.

Before taking note of those theological views which are relevant for an ethic of sex, we must preface some remarks concerning Abelard's theological method. In contrast with Anselm of Canterbury, he is sometimes presented as a scholar who seeks to arraign faith at the bar of reason. Anselm represents the man of faith seeking understanding whereas Abelard is the philosopher who sets out to test the validity of faith. Although not devoid of insight, this schematic distinction ignores certain elements in the thought of both men and betrays little awareness of their subtlety. Certainly, in the Christian Theology Abelard makes quite clear that faith is the starting-point of his thought. Quoting Paul, he points out that "no one knows the things of God, but the Spirit of God, especially when, except by divine illumination, no one can learn the least things; and unless God instructs the mind from within, he who teaches simply beats the air".<sup>9</sup> Consequently he has nothing but contempt for 'these professors of dialectic and their like'

9. Theol. Christ., iii, col. 1120b (referring to 1 Corinthians 2:11).

who 'lack faith and hope' and merely 'follow the evidence of their senses'. They 'are the most miserable of men'.<sup>10</sup> These are sentiments which Anselm would have endorsed.

Anselm would have been less likely to agree with the means by which Abelard seeks to elucidate and support faith and hope. The basic subject of the Christian Theology is the Trinity and Abelard summarizes his working procedure as follows: "All discussion on controversial topics is concerned either with the written word or with reason. To reach satisfactory conclusions, therefore, I have considered that it was first necessary to extract statements for the confirmation of our faith from the writings of outstanding wise thinkers. In the second place, I regard it as necessary to support these authorities by reason in order to round off the disputation which I have taken in hand."<sup>11</sup> Since this methodology establishes that faith is the presupposition of enquiry Anselm might have accepted its definition of the role to be played by reason. However, he would have objected to the catholicity which Abelard introduces into the conception of authority. Among the 'outstanding wise thinkers' who testify to Christian truth Abelard includes classical philosophers, poets, and oracles together with Jewish prophets.<sup>12</sup> Although we do not propose to investigate the merits and

10. Ibid, iii, col. 1224a.

11. Ibid, iii, col. 1211b.

12. Ibid, i, col. 1126c and ff. Abelard knew neither Greek nor Hebrew and, therefore, had to rely upon translations in order to study the 'outstanding wise thinkers' whom he considered to be his authorities. (cf. J. Huizinga, op. cit., p. 170 - essay on John of Salisbury).

dangers of claiming that the philosophers received 'divine illumination', we should note that this indicates a bias towards the rational faculty as the proper subject of Christian inspiration. Nevertheless this does not mean that Abelard was interested solely in the thought of non-Christian thinkers. Philosophy is not just a matter of proper exercise of the rational faculty. Rather, because it is true thinking it involves proper exercise of the other human faculties, both as a confirmation and as a necessary condition of right reason. In other words, philosophy is a form of life and not just a special activity. Hence Abelard considers it insufficient to cite ideas alone. 'After the faith and moral teaching of the philosophers and their purpose or intention of leading the good life, let us look at this life itself'.<sup>13</sup>

He claims that their conception of the state was founded upon charity as defined by 'the rule of love found in St. Matthew 19:19'.<sup>14</sup> For this reason Socrates advocated community of wives. 'He was thinking of the fruits of marriage, not of pleasure taken in wives'.<sup>15</sup> In other words, he considered that children should not be regarded as private property. Supported by the testimony of Jerome, Abelard refers to 'the retreat from the world of these men into the quietude of the solitary life',<sup>16</sup> and especially emphasizes that 'the philosophers set themselves

13. Ibid, ii, col. 1179b.

14. Ibid, ii, col. 1180b. c.

15. Ibid, ii, col. 1181 b.

16. Ibid, ii, col., 1184 c, 1185c, 1190b.

to a life of continence. They wished to have time for thought: they did not desire to reduce their forces by giving way before the distraction of women. They knew that from affection for his family a man may be drawn off into unlawful or base acts, or may contract some ill-fame not by his own nature but by the vices of wives. Socrates himself well knew this danger and is an example of the importance to a philosopher of the blameless life, and of avoiding another union adulterous to that with philosophy herself.<sup>17</sup>

At first sight this basis for a low estimation of the sexual function, women, and the marital state, may appear to be little different from that offered by the Augustinian tradition. Sexual concern is a hindrance to the soul's pursuit of the beatific vision. However, Abelard has introduced a new element into this claim. For, although the Augustinian view depends largely upon a similar premium on reason, it refers solely to the era and sphere of grace. As their Law reveals, family life and the pursuit of offspring was not only proper but necessary for the Jews. Abelard refuses to make the pursuit of continence depend upon the advent of grace and, writing to Heloise, goes so far as to say that 'the curse of the Law coerced the Jews into marriage.'<sup>18</sup> He has perceived the inherent contradiction of the

17. Ibid, ii, col. 1197 d.

18. Letter 7, in op.cit., p. 135.

Augustinian view which, on the one hand seeks to make grace the constitutive principle of world-renunciation and, on the other, seeks to justify this by referring to natural principles or the ontological structure, namely the primacy of reason in man's quest for the divine. He resolves the contradiction not by querying the identity between grace and reason as principles of world-renunciation, but by making grace an irrelevant consideration in this matter.

The philosophers, then, do not just commend themselves to Christian approval by their teaching and life, but constitute a genuine authority for faith. They are not, however, the supreme authority. For 'Christian philosophy', which, Abelard tells Heloise, is identical with 'the monastic prerogative',<sup>19</sup> takes its form from Christ who completed what philosophers and prophets had formerly begun.<sup>20</sup> This shows that the practical intent of Abelard's account of world-renunciation was to justify the monastic system. In principle, however, he presents a conception of the academic life which does not require support from either a Christian school of thought or an ecclesiastical institution. Hence we should not be surprised that the model of the bachelor-scholar remained operative in Western culture long after the Universities ceased to be extensions of the church and their students, its 'clerks'. Although the church was the agent which handed down the model, later generations realized that it was acceptable on non-theological grounds. Existence was conceived to be the sphere in which two competitive principles - mind and body - struggled for total dominance and reason was

19. Ibid, p. 116.

20. Ibid, pp. 107ff.

expected to triumph. The philosophical distinction between mind and body which Descartes made the basis for epistemological investigation reflects this ontological conception of competing life-principles.

Abelard commenced his scholarly career with the study of philosophy and had already proceeded to theological enquiry before his affair with Heloise.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, there is little reason to doubt that the low estimation of their passion in his (and her) letters was implicit in his attitude even at the time of the affair.<sup>22</sup> Whatever our judgment of

21. v. Hist. Cal., ii - v.

22. In Hist. Cal., vii, Abelard states that Heloise attempted to dissuade him from marriage by arguing that 'the philosophers', as well as Scripture and the Fathers, had demonstrated that the state of matrimony is an 'obstacle to philosophic study'. Although he attributes this definition of the philosophical life to Heloise, Abelard must have encountered it during his early studies in philosophy and theology. For it was a matter of common conviction in scholarly circles. When William of Champeau (one of Abelard's academic opponents) retired from the cathedral school of Notre Dame to the cloister, Hildebert, the future Archbishop of Tours, commended his action with the words: 'solitude is in very truth philosophy in practice' (quoted by Lloyd in op.cit., p.39). In all probability, then, Heloise first learned her argument from Abelard, though this certainly does not mean that she would not have employed it 'against' him in order to promote his career. By ascribing the argument to her, however, Abelard accentuates the shameful character of his behaviour. He, not Heloise, failed to recall the ideals to which he had committed himself.

As Mary McLaughlin has pointed out, the lens of calamity and the sense of shame provide Abelard's autobiography with a unity which reflects his quest for personal identity (v. op.cit., pp. 472-476, 480-488). In order to achieve this unity, Abelard does not simply interpret his past behaviour in the light of his present condition. He seeks instead for a central motif which corresponds to a recurrent feature of his life and which will, therefore, bind his various experiences together. Now, his sense of shame was not a product of a late and violent conversion to ascetic ideals but was implicit from the moment he embarked upon an academic career. Indeed, until he fell in love with Heloise, 'fastidiousness and a white heat of intellect had kept him chaste and he had small interest in lay society' (Helen Waddell, The Wandering Scholars, Constable & Co. London, 1927, p. 195). Passion may have subverted intellect and shame for a time, but given the character of the man, the latter were bound to reassert themselves. In the Story Of Calamities, then, Abelard proffers a genuine apology for his past (cf. Mary McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 468).

their relationship may be, for Abelard it provided confirmation of the split between mind and body at the heart of existence.

One of Abelard's chief contributions to theological debate was his exposition of the Trinitarian dogma. It will suffice for us to note its basic features. He maintains that the Godhead is a unity of substance and simple essence in which the persons are distinguished by their 'proper functions.'<sup>23</sup> 'The proper function of one person is never transferred into another person, or communicated from one to another, otherwise we should not speak of "proper function" but of "community of function"'.<sup>24</sup> Abelard employs this conception of the non-transference of specific characteristics in order to avert the danger of modalism which arises from his 'Platonic' appreciation of the divine unity. Nevertheless, he does tend to regard the Father as the substance of the Trinity as well as a distinct person within the Godhead. Thus he introduces the analogy of the image which is produced from a lump of wax as a means of illustrating the generation of the Son from the Father.<sup>25</sup> Like the other two persons, however, the Father

23. Theol. Christ., iii, col. 1229 b, c.

24. Ibid, iii, col. 1229d, 1230a.

25. Ibid, iv., col., 1288c, d, 1289a.

does possess a specific characteristic. He represents the Power of the Godhead, whereas the Son and the Spirit respectively represent its Wisdom and its Goodness.<sup>26</sup>

In accordance with his account of the Trinity, Abelard considers that the primary purpose of the Incarnation was the communication of wisdom. Of course, the Godhead was incarnate. 'But', Abelard continues, 'when it is said that the Son was incarnate, it is meant that the light of divine wisdom shone forth through this incarnation on carnal things'.<sup>27</sup> This view of the Incarnation is the source of Abelard's most radical challenges to theological tradition, namely, his understanding of the atonement and of original sin. He expounds John 1:14 as follows: 'This is as much as to say: "Wisdom was made incarnate so that by its illumination the knowledge of Wisdom might dwell with us"'. Abelard proceeds immediately to state the role of the Incarnate Word which is implied in this view of his person: 'In the flesh which He assumed He instructed and taught us perfectly by the converse of His life, by the passion of His death, and by the glory of His resurrection and ascension'.<sup>28</sup> Heloise is forcefully reminded that 'He Himself is the Way whereby the faithful out of exile pass into the promised land. Who also raised up the Cross, wherefrom He thus cries,

26. Theol. Christ., i, col. 1123-1125.

27. Ibid, iv. col. 1278 b.

28. Ibid, iv. col. 1278 d.



as a ladder for us to that end'.<sup>29</sup>

If instruction and the example of his deeds constitute the essential work of Christ, then man cannot be in such bondage to sin as to be incapable of contributing anything towards his own salvation. There can be no inherited burden of concupiscence nor debt to divine justice whose removal depends upon grace alone. Were such a special dispensation of grace necessary for man, Abelard could not regard pre-Christian philosophers as genuine authorities for faith. Despite man's capacity to achieve genuine virtue apart from Christ, however, Abelard can maintain that the Incarnation was necessary. It alone can provide a clear manifestation of wisdom and a firm example of virtue without which few can attain to good.<sup>30</sup> This implies that mankind is in a state of general debility which could not be remedied in the absence of the Incarnation.

Abelard firmly repudiates the view that this, or any other kind of ignorance or weakness can be identified with sin.<sup>31</sup> What, then, remains of the doctrine of original sin? Abelard claims that 'when we say that young children have "original sin", or that we all, as the apostle says, sinned in Adam, this amounts to saying that our punishment or the sentence of our condemnation takes its rise from his sin'.<sup>32</sup>

29. Letter 5, in op. cit., p. 82.

30. cf. Letter 7, in op. cit., p. 107.

31. v. *Ethica seu Scite Teipsum*, i - iii.

32. *Ibid*, xiv.

In other words, the doctrine does not set out to describe man's state of being or an element in his being considered in itself. It merely points to man's awareness of the divine wrath. This has resulted from 'the sin of his first parents'. Abelard expounds the crucial words of Psalm 50:7 as follows:- 'When. . . David says that he was conceived in iniquity or sin, he sees himself subject to the general sentence of damnation from the guilt of his racial parents'.<sup>33</sup> Thus Abelard emphasizes the divine judgment and rejects the view that sin is an element in the solidarity of the human race. This becomes clear when we notice how much his discussion of original sin focusses on the predicament of the infant. The soul of the infant, he assures us, is free from sin. The infant bears no personal guilt. The only 'stain' or 'contact with sinful corruption' which it bears 'is in reference to penalty owed by mankind because of Adam's sin'.<sup>34</sup> The sole and sufficient reason for this liability is the autonomous will of God whose justice man must first accept and only then subject to investigation. Apart from pointing out that children are not the only innocent people  
<sup>35</sup>  
 whom we see afflicted, however, Abelard does not seek to justify their eternal damnation. He seems to have realized that their suffering does not belong to the same category as that of innocent adults. Damned without having merited it, they cannot be regarded as individuals whose

33. Ibid, iii.

34. Ibid and cf. xiv.

35. Ibid, xiv.

faith is being purged or tested or as examples who encourage others to virtue. Nevertheless, Abelard thinks that their case is no more remarkable than that of baptized infants who 'are saved without merits and attain to eternal life by grace alone'.<sup>36</sup> Here his reason for treating the doctrine of original sin as relevant primarily to the question of infant damnation becomes clear. Those who have passed beyond infancy and, with the use of reason, are capable of making moral decisions, will be judged according to their personal virtue or sin.<sup>37</sup> Baptism is not necessary for their salvation.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the result of Abelard's account of original sin is not only to deny that it refers to an aspect of human solidarity, but to posit two different forms of baptism, one signifying God's grace upon children, the other

36. Ibid.

37. cf. Ibid, v and vii.

38. Similarly, neither is penance. By our sorrow for sin or good intention 'we at once are reconciled to God' (Ethica, xix). The public act (baptism or penance) is however, a useful confirmation of the state of grace which is already established. By limiting the efficacy of the church's offices, Abelard checks the institution's claim to absolute authority over the destiny of the individual. Nevertheless, his account of original sin promotes the role of the institution by encouraging parents to identify their children with it through the sacrament of baptism. Furthermore, he states that penance may only be omitted in exceptional circumstances, e.g. when death prevents it or when no trustworthy priests can be found (Ethica, xix and xxv).

signifying man's intention to seek virtue and the grace which is its reward.<sup>39</sup>

On both moral and theological grounds, then, Abelard would have done better to reject or ignore the doctrine of original sin. His notion of God's transcendent and autonomous will does not depend upon it but is morely invoked to justify his account of the subject. Despite its weaknesses, however, this does reject the Augustinian identification of original sin with a particular element of human being, viz., desire, especially sexual. However, by using the doctrine to justify the notion of infant perdition he does nothing to raise the value of human generation. The possibility of baptism, as Coulton points out, would do little to allay the anxieties of prospective parents especially mothers.<sup>40</sup> Since it is conceived to be a remedy for the precarious status of the infant, baptism also fails to banish the stigma which theology had attached to the process of procreation. If the need of baptism encouraged parents to appreciate the religious dimension of their children's nurture it also served the purpose of the institutional church by inducing parents to make their children members of the body of Christ.

39. Abelard allows this view of baptism to remain implicit in his discussion. To quote Huizinga, "Abelard remains the man of the nuance, of the relations with both sides, who proposes agreements and points of view and leaves ambiguities open instead of declaring in utter confidence "this is the way it is" (v. Men And Ideas, op. cit., p. 192).

40. G.G. Coulton, Five Centuries Of Religion, vol. I, op. cit., p.73.

Abelard maintains the theological tradition which held that Eve was primarily responsible for the first sin, with its devastating consequences for her daughters' children. Adam's sin was slight by comparison with the number and nature of our sins. His fault 'was not to have crushed anyone by force or rifled their belongings, but the tasting only once of fruit which could be restored to Eve the owner of it'.<sup>41</sup> She is the one who took possession of the forbidden fruit and is therefore, as he tells Heloise "the root of all evil".<sup>42</sup> In a later letter he elucidates the wider implications of her sin. Speaking of the strength of the devil, he asks: "What will the weaker sex be able to avail against him? By whom is his seduction so greatly to be feared as by woman? For her he first of all seduced, and through her, her husband likewise, and led all their posterity captive".<sup>43</sup> The slightness of Adam's sin at least shows that Abelard did not regard that first sin as sexual.<sup>44</sup> But he regarded Eve not only as the root of all evil, but as the type of all sinners. She 'passed through the three stages to the commission of sin', namely, evil suggestion which

41. *Ethica*, xviii.

42. Letter 7, in op. cit., p.126.

43. Letter 8, in op. cit., p. 162.

44. In the previous letter Abelard refers to 'the celibate life of Paradise', which suggests that he thought that sexual activity was an effect of the Fall (v. Letter 7, in op. cit., p. 126). In the *Ethica*, however, he states that 'matrimonial intercourse' was permitted in Paradise and claims that this proves that divine permission does not necessarily imply the presence of sin (v. *Ethica*, iii, and cf., inf., pp. 276. ).

produces delight, inward consent to desire, and consummation by deed.<sup>45</sup>  
 A traditional form of Biblical interpretation, which enables him to specify the workings of God's transcendent will and to draw moral generalizations from well-chosen texts, makes Abelard's novel account of original sin as inimical to woman and the sexual function as former expositions of that doctrine.

The subject of our enquiry has required that we draw attention to Abelard's understanding of the first two persons of the Trinity and rather overlook his concept of the third. We have seen how the Father's power operates through his transcendent justice and the Son's wisdom through the Incarnation and the illumination which this brings to man's mind. In fact, Abelard has an equally strong appreciation of the Holy Spirit's goodness and its effects. This is attested as much by his deeds as by his writings. When, seeking to forsake the pressures of men, he built his oratory in 'a certain wilderness in the Troyes country' and numerous scholars flocked to his presence,, he renamed the place Paraclete. In defence of the unusual gesture - it was customary to dedicate such institutions to the Trinity, the Son, or one of the saints - he pointed out that the office of Comforter was not the prerogative of one person in the Trinity and that Scripture appeared to justify dedication in the name of the third person rather than either of the others.<sup>46</sup> This

45. *Ethica*, iii.

46. *Hist. Cal.*, x and xi.

notion of the general goodness of the Godhead and the distinctive activity of the Holy Spirit is frequently emphasized in his writings. Through the Holy Spirit God's purpose is 'carried out into good effect' in the world.<sup>47</sup> Hence the Incarnation, though not the embodiment of grace, is the effect of the Holy Spirit. The Incarnation, whose purpose was 'to grant the light of true wisdom to His predestined people',<sup>48</sup> is a sign of divine goodness as also of divine power.<sup>49</sup> God, he tells Heloise, is 'Piety itself and Mercy' and sets his face against those who refuse to show mercy under pretext of maintaining justice.<sup>50</sup> In the Ethics, he arraigns the priests who greedily impose penance upon the poor and have not learned that the 'Truth' prefers mercy to sacrifice.<sup>51</sup> He also suggests that genuine repentance can only proceed from love of God's patient kindness, and not from fear of his justice.<sup>52</sup> This, it must be admitted, does not easily harmonize with an earlier remark that the purpose of innocent suffering is 'that greater terror may be inspired in the wicked by the wider extension of punishment'.<sup>53</sup> However, we have noted sufficient emphasis on divine goodness, both as an example to man and as a claim upon him, to be entitled to expect that Abelard's ethics will reveal a more positive attitude to personal relations than we have hitherto

47. Theol. Christ, iv. col. 1307 a.

48. Ibid, iv. col., 1279 d.

49. Ibid, iv, col. 1282 a.

50. Letter 3, in op. cit., p. 54.

51. Ethica, xviii (referring to Matthew 9:13)

52. Ethica, xviii and xix.

53. Ibid, xiv.

met.

### Abelard's ethics.

No feature of Abelard's thought has attracted as much attention as his account of moral decision and judgment. This interest in his ethics is justified in so far as it recognizes that he makes a major break with traditional views.<sup>54</sup> Abelard regards mental consent or intention as the sole and sufficient criterion of moral behaviour, i.e., it is this internal consent which determines that a particular activity is moral activity. Intention then, is the proper subject of ethical enquiry. 'God considers not the action, but the spirit of the action. It is the intention, not the deed wherein the merit or praise of the deed consists'.<sup>55</sup> Otherwise, Abelard says, to hang a guilty person for the sake of revenge would be morally equivalent to doing so 'out of zeal for justice'.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, if deeds possessed intrinsic moral worth and so added value to good intentions then moral status would depend in part upon the hazards of fortune. 'The richer men were, the better they could be, since from their stock of wealth they would be able to augment their piety by their philanthropy'.<sup>57</sup>

54. Some scholars have made extravagant claims for Abelard's ethical thought. Thus, J. Ramsay McCallum considers that Abelard's 'doctrine of intention or moral individualism' is 'the ethical ground of Protestantism' (v. Abailard's Ethics, op. cit., p.4). However, McCallum makes a more careful and moderate assessment of Abelard's affinities with the Reformers in his later publication, Abelard's Christian Theology (op. cit., pp. 94f.) In C.K. Scott Moncrieff's edition of the letters of Abelard and Heloise, George Moore cites Abelard's respect for the individual conscience as proof that 'he was a Protestant born' and also claims that 'we owe our Protestant conscience to Abelard' (v. op. cit., p. xvi.)

55. *Ethica*, iii.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, vii.



In effect, Abelard here distinguishes between the moral and social status of an individual. Good deeds are a sufficient basis for the judgment society makes of a person but not for that which a moralist seeks. However, this distinction does not justify Abelard's claim that deeds are improper subjects for ethical enquiry or that God assesses 'the soul in its scheme of intention, not in the outward result of its action'.<sup>58</sup> By claiming that deeds are not a matter of ethical concern, he implies that intention is under no empirical constraint and thus appears to sanction a total flight from reality or irresponsibility by default. For example, a British undergraduate could refer to his intention of overthrowing apartheid in South Africa both as a proof of his moral worth and, therefore, as an excuse for ignoring services whose execution is within reach of his resources. Abelard does not overlook this possibility of abusing intention. He endeavours to guard against it by two means, one psychological, the other ethical. First, he points out that a wish or desire, though a necessary condition for consent, is not equivalent to intention.<sup>59</sup> This merely establishes the possibility, but not the propriety, of intention being limited by practical considerations. The latter is guaranteed by prudence 'which is not so much a virtue as the mother of all virtues. Through prudence we have general discretion to deal with

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid, iii.

the particular circumstances of time and place, and to adapt ourselves to the conditions of persons'.<sup>60</sup>

This account of prudence retains the ethical primacy of intention. Prudence merely defines the limits of intention or specifies what form it should take. It may not be permitted to fly freely upon the wings of fancy, but must have due regard for a person's life-setting. Hence prudence is the sine qua non or, to use Abelard's term, 'the mother' of all the virtues. However, this clearly implies that external effects should result from intention and therefore requires that deeds be regarded as proper, though not sufficient, subject-matter for ethics. If intention must come to terms with the foreseeable effects of its execution, then, other things being equal, it alone cannot constitute the sum of moral worth. In some circumstances at least, failure to act upon intention will imply moral deficiency. Despite his high estimate of prudence, however, Abelard refuses to modify his notion that deeds have no moral value. He maintains a hiatus between intention and action which jeopardizes the moral, but not the psychological, imperative to the latter. Intention is distinguished from will which Abelard regards as the executive function of reason. In other words, the will is the agent through which intention is carried through to action. Essentially a technical faculty it, like the deed to which it leads, possesses no intrinsic moral import and adds no moral value to prudent intention.<sup>61</sup>

60. Ibid - a fragment of a second book of the Ethics.

61. Ethica, iii, cf. Theol. Christ., v. col. 1325 a: 'In our human judgment we consider that a reasonable cause for doing something good should be followed by action'.

Leaving aside the question whether prudence does not imply something equally important for execution as for formulation (for will as for intention), we shall investigate Abelard's reasons for dismissing deeds as ethically irrelevant which, of course, prevents him from giving an adequate account of inter-personal responsibility. His stated reasons are the ethical ambiguity and uncontrollable or haphazard character of outward actions. Neither is sufficient to establish his claim. The former only demonstrates, as Thomas Aquinas later pointed out, that the true character of an act is not always apparent. From the moral perspective the two cases of hanging appear as different classes of act. Hence one does not have to sacrifice the value of deeds in order to maintain a viable concept of justice or the integrity of divine judgment.<sup>62</sup> One merely has to bring the deed into relation with intention.<sup>63</sup> The second reason which Abelard advances in support of his claim, together with the example he offers, deserves closer scrutiny. Again, we find that the danger of impugning God's justice is what most worries him. If God regards man's actions then, Abelard fears, he will be bound to give greater approval to those whom wealth, power, and favourable circumstances have enabled to perform great deeds. However, this will only be true if justice pays no attention to contingencies. Abelard has forgotten the significance of the parable of

62. cf. *Ethica*, iii.

63. cf. the following remarks of Odon Lottin: 's'il a pu affirmer que la moralité n'existe pas dans l'acte externe, c'est parce qu'il n'a vu en celui-ci que son entité physique, ne soupçonnant pas qu'entre un acte considéré objectivement dans son entité physique et ce même acte considéré dans son entité morale subjective (celle de l'intention), il faut discerner le même acte dans son entité morale objective' (v. *Psychologie Et Morale Aux XII<sup>e</sup> Et XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècles*, Tome IV, Troisième Partie, I, Louvain, Abbaye Du Mont César, 1954, p.315).

the talents. His example concerns two men who 'set about the same scheme of building poor-houses'. One completes his task but the other is prevented from doing so because a burglary depletes his financial resources. Surely, says Abelard, this cannot 'lessen his merit with God' or make him less acceptable to God than the successful man.<sup>64</sup> First, let us note that, initially at least, the intentions of the two men are quite prudent. If we suppose that they remain so, then, in his altered circumstances, the one who is robbed will modify or abandon his original intention. Therefore the cases are no longer comparable. However, if he retains his original intention, the burgled man is shown to be imprudent, that is, morally deficient, while the other is not. Either way the example contains a non sequitur because Abelard, having first admitted the value of prudence, fails to see that it is capable of meeting unforeseen contingencies. If prudence can do this, so too can divine justice. Hence it is possible to admit that deeds possess moral value without impugning either those who cannot perform them or divine justice. The comments with which Abelard concludes his example reveal the individualistic character of his ethics. The moral value of building shelters for the poor is judged solely by reference to the rational agent. The benefit to others is, of course, assumed but it cannot be an ethical consideration. For this would externalize moral worth in deeds and in so doing, would undermine the equity of the moral struggle. Some individuals would be able to acquire merit more easily than others.

64. *Ethica*, vii.

Abelard's account of intention is a product of his rationalism. Thus, prudence applies to the mind as it forms intention not to the will as it executes the latter. The ethical ideal of justice, like the concept of God, cannot deal with the contingencies of temporal affairs without difficulty. Deeds belong to the realm of fact not value and, even though they proceed from rational activity, they are too ambiguous and fortuitous to be trustworthy signs of intention. This separation between the realms of fact and value is founded upon Abelard's acceptance of the 'Platonic' view that moral values are ontologically constituted, i.e., form part of the structure of being. This implies that 'sin has no reality' and 'exists rather in not being, than in being'.<sup>65</sup> It can therefore be defined only in negative terms such as 'contempt of God' or 'sinking below a standard'.<sup>66</sup> Since they possess real status, deeds can never be intrinsically evil. Neither can they be intrinsically good in the moral sense, for then we should have to say that a man intent upon evil acquires merit (or lessens his demerit), when he acts. Like other elements or products of the natural world, from the mind, considered in itself, to works of art, deeds only possess an aesthetic value. They harmonize with a well-ordered cosmos. Therefore, as we have seen, Abelard dispenses with a moral but not a psychological imperative to execute intention.

Lack of intrinsic moral value is sufficient to deny the factual sphere any significant place in ethical enquiry. However, the mind,

65. Ibid, iii.

66. Ibid.

while not capable of possessing evil (as though the latter were a quality with real status), is the sphere in which values may be discerned. Since the ontological conception of ethics makes the discovery of value the essential ethical task, the mind qualifies as the proper sphere of moral activity and of ethical enquiry. Abelard's opening statement in the Ethics is that the study of morals is concerned 'with the defects or qualities of the mind which dispose us to bad or good actions'.<sup>67</sup> From the necessity of knowledge Abelard concluded, to the scandal of most of his contemporaries, that the Jews who crucified Christ were not guilty of sin.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, he agreed that they sinned in the extended sense of performing a wrong action and that this rendered them fit subjects for punishment. Further, their infidelity, though innocent, would be sufficient to prevent their salvation.<sup>69</sup> Thus, without sacrificing the distinction between intention and deed, he set narrow bounds to tolerance. His emphasis on the integrity of conscience

67. Ibid, prologue.

68. Ibid, xiii and xiv. Medieval exegesis involved a constant search for allegorical meanings because it was founded on the conviction that most Biblical statements are directly relevant to men of every generation. Thus the destiny of women was indelibly marked by the sin of Eve. When Abelard exonerated the persecutors of Christ, then, he challenged the current attitude to the Jews. This aspect of his thought was not overlooked by those who sought his condemnation at the Council of Sens. In a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Thierry draws attention to Abelard's discussion of the Jews 'who stoned Stephen, and who crucified the Lord' and claims that it is one of many things in the Ethics 'which, both in spiritual and moral concerns, are ... objectionable and dangerous' (v. J.-P. Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, op. cit., vol. CLXXX, col. 250f. and vol. CLXXXII, col. 531; parts of the letter are translated in J. Ramsay McCallum, Abailard's Ethics, op. cit., pp. 7f). We should note that the traditional attitude to the Jews did not necessarily imply support for all who persecuted them. Bernard of Clairvaux believed that Christ was glorified by the death of a pagan and that Christians were therefore entitled to rejoice at this occurrence but 'he constantly and publicly protested against the terrible massacres of Jews which took place in connection with the Second Crusade' (Roger B. Lloyd, op. cit., pp. 187f.).

69. Ethica, xiv.

does represent a check to the universal pretensions of the church, but there is little reason to doubt that he would have supported her punitive Crusades.

Before enquiring further concerning the practical application of Abelard's ethical presuppositions, we should attend to the perennial problem of an ontological ethic which is how to account for perverse or wilful evil. Given that man knows the good and the sanction for failure to implement it, what reason could possibly lead him to choose evil? Lacking a strong doctrine of original sin Abelard has to reject the possibility of such a radical will to evil. 'I mean', he asks rhetorically, 'how can we say that we wish to despise God?'<sup>70</sup> He does refer to the attractiveness of many forbidden things, for example, 'the wives of influential men', and 'the weakness of the flesh', but such factors cannot explain the 'reprobate' who is 'willing to do wrong' but 'unwilling to bear the just punishment of wrong-doing',<sup>71</sup> because no reason for his wilful consent to desire is proffered. Instead he is presented as the most irrational of men which means that, according to Abelard's ethical presuppositions, he can scarcely be regarded as guilty of sin. He could only be so if the will were allowed independent moral status. Abelard's difficulty in dealing with this problem arises from the rigorous consistency of his rational approach to ethics. It is therefore noteworthy that, despite his rejection of the Augustinian view

70. Ibid, iii.

71. Ibid.

of original sin, when he tries to explain the supremely irrational phenomenon of evil the notions of 'concupiscence' and 'the weakness of the flesh' soon emerge.<sup>72</sup> As we shall shortly see, he also highlights the detrimental influence of alcohol, especially its close connection with sexual desire.<sup>73</sup> By its essential opposition to elements or aspects of existence which, despite their mysterious and chaotic character, previous civilizations had been able to accommodate, Christian theology has fashioned that distinctive and tragic figure of Western manhood, the 'reprobate'. Dionysus has been transformed into Satan.

The most outstanding feature of Abelard's thought is that he has asked and, by his radical answers, demanded that attention be given to questions designed to clarify the bases of medieval ethical thought. His view of the status of external acts, for example, not only drew attention to the logical content of an ethic founded upon pure reason, but severely limited the significance of penance and confession and so called for more careful attention to the church's role as a moral authority. His respect for the integrity of conscience did likewise. The possibility of relating the concept of justice to the contingencies of human affairs (circumstances) was another question which could no longer be ignored. Neither could later scholars overlook such difficulties as the meaning of inherited or original sin and the nature of wilful disobedience which Abelard's notion of the autonomy of the rational agent had raised.

72. Ibid.

73. v. inf., p. 275.



Unfortunately, as we must now note more fully, Abelard's ethical principles were not destined to challenge later generations to reconsider the traditional judgment of sexual matters.

Since he conceives the mind to be the proper sphere of moral activity and so also of ethical investigation, Abelard supports the Augustinian view of the moral life as the mind's struggle to overcome the body in order that it may attain the knowledge and the presence of God, 'the highest Good'.<sup>74</sup> 'All sins are of the mind only', he writes, 'for there alone can be the crime and the contempt of God, where is the seat of the knowledge of Him, and where reason resides'. However, weakness of the mind is not the sole cause of sin. The mind also conceives erroneous desire through the will which, as Cassian claimed, 'concerns both the flesh and the spirit'. Hence, 'the weakness of the flesh' can cause the mind to desire 'certain things which, on the verdict of reason, it either recoils from or rebukes'.<sup>75</sup> Like Cassian, Abelard does not regard this as an evil situation. On the contrary, it is the necessary ground for man's moral quest. Natural defects provide men with 'the material of a struggle whereby they may ... triumph over themselves and win the crown'.<sup>76</sup> While, then, he does not identify one or more of these 'defects' with original sin Abelard evaluates them just as negatively as Augustine and the ascetics. 'It is vicious to give in to our desires';<sup>77</sup> 'it is degrading to be beaten by one's lower self'.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore,

74. cf. e.g. *Theol. Christ.*, v. col., 1329 c; Letter 5, in *op.cit.* p. 77.

75. *Ethica*, vi.

76. *Ibid*, ii.

77. *Ibid*, iii.

78. *Ibid*, ii.

although sexual desire is not the only kind of natural weakness which Abelard has in mind, it is the example which recurs most frequently throughout his writings.<sup>79</sup> We cannot explain this attitude to sexuality simply by referring to the chance experiences of his personal life, since these are not self-explanatory. Rather, since sexual desire constitutes the gravest threat to rational activity, Abelard interprets his affair with Heloise as the time of his most grievous moral peril.<sup>80</sup> Thus the voice of experience supported that of the schools whose authorities agreed that virtue was gravely threatened by sex.

If the authority of the philosophers supported the traditional low estimate of sex, woman, and family life, Abelard's conception of the moral life founded upon the primacy of reason positively demanded this. The letters to Heloise furnish the occasion but not, as a result of their affair, the cause of a rehearsal of traditional language and attitudes. Thus he gives thanks to God that he has been 'set ... free from the heavy yoke of concupiscence' and that divine grace has cleansed his 'vilest members which from their practice of the utmost filthiness are called shameful'.<sup>81</sup> In another letter he says that 'both sin and nature' have made "the female sex" contemptible. Her creation in Paradise proves that God had to make special allowance for woman's inferior nature. He could afford to create man, whose integrity enables him to support himself, outside Paradise.<sup>82</sup> Woman's lower status, rendered worse by Eve's sin,

79. v. e.g. Ibid, iii, vii, ix.

80. v. Hist. Cal., vi; Letter 5, in op.cit., pp. 75ff.

81. Letter 5, in op.cit., p.79.

82. Letter 7, in op. cit., p.126.

makes any form of contact with her dubious. Abelard therefore instructs Heloise, now in charge of a group of nuns at the Paraclete, that monks 'shall be kept apart from the privacy of the sisters' and that, if conversation is necessary, it must be held in the presence of witnesses and be brief.<sup>83</sup> If true virtue requires the separation of the sexes, aspersion is inevitably cast upon the marital state. Later in the same letter Abelard states that the married are less easily saved than the continent who, by withdrawing from 'the tumults of the world', are 'able more purely to devote (them) selves to God'.<sup>84</sup> Here Abelard highlights yet another inconsistency of traditional teaching which, for similar reasons, regarded marriage as a lower level of virtue and so worthy of a lesser reward, but hesitated to admit that it was an obstacle on the path to salvation.

Avoidance of contact with members of the opposite sex is but one example of the essential character of the monk's life which Abelard, following Jerome, defines as solitude.<sup>85</sup> This form of existence is required by the conception of the moral life as an internal struggle for the supremacy of reason. The individual does not need social intercourse to provide him with material for moral warfare. Indeed, he must flee contact with others in order to avoid those objects which, through the will, tempt the mind to fleshly delight and so undermine reason's authority. Solitude is, therefore, the outward manifestation of an

83. Letter 8, in op.cit., p. 166.

84. Ibid, p. 188.

85. Ibid, p. 152.

individualistic conception of the moral life. Even the office of a religious superior is subject to the dangers inherent in taking responsibility for the lives of others. Referring to her role as Deaconness, Abelard tells Heloise: 'It is a great thing, if any one be sufficient to save himself alone, and it is a perilous thing for him to provide for many who is barely able to watch over himself'.<sup>86</sup>

Abelard's view of the sexual dimension of existence shows that, like Anselm, he considered certain forms of activity to be incompatible with virtue. Despite the similarity of their ethical principles, however, Abelard was able to maintain this opinion with less difficulty than Anselm. Whereas the specification of immoral acts tends to conflict with the primacy of the will, it can harmonize with the primacy of intention. For it is not self-contradictory to assert that actions of various kinds must be excluded before the will is allowed to make intention operative. Neither the purpose nor the result of Abelard's ethics, then, is to render all modes of existence morally neutral and so optional for the man of good intent.

In the Ethics Abelard rather confusingly refers to the process whereby specific acts are excluded from intention, as a struggle between 'our evil will' and 'the divine will'. However, his example of the former 'will' is the concupiscence which sight of a woman may arouse in a man. This indicates that he is equating the term with 'wish' or desire, i.e., without implying the mind's consent.<sup>87</sup> This

86. Ibid, p. 202.

87. v. Ethica, iii.

use of the term is sanctioned by his notion of the will as an intermediary between the mind and the external world such that it not only gives effect to intention but introduces the mind to 'fleshly delight'.<sup>88</sup> We shall shortly have occasion to note that Abelard does not identify the divine will with the findings of human reason, although he discerns no essential conflict between them. First, however, we must draw attention to one aspect of traditional teaching which his principles did lead him to challenge.

Since deeds have no inherent moral value and can only be judged in the light of the intention which they express, the same must be true of any pleasure to which they give rise. Abelard regards as absurd the view that pleasure is necessarily sinful. It would mean, he says, that invalids whose recovery is aided by delicate dishes could not escape guilt. Further, 'God, the Creator of nourishment and of the bodies which receive it, would not be without guilt for having instilled savours which necessarily involve in sin those who ignorantly use them'.<sup>89</sup> By permitting the married to have sexual intercourse, God would increase his guilt since, like the eating of tasty food, the sexual act is accompanied by pleasure.<sup>90</sup> The force with which Abelard propounds his view of pleasure bears indirect testimony to the strength of the opposing view. Nevertheless, his attempt at rehabilitation may appear somewhat futile in the light of his general attitude to sexual behaviour. Within the context of his own

88. Ibid, iii and vi.

89. Ibid, iii.

90. Ibid.

thought, his estimate of pleasure does bear only minor practical import, but he has at least made a trenchant attack on the prevailing position. Like so much of his thought, this was to bear fruit in the reassessment of traditional ideas to which he committed later scholars. Thomas Aquinas will employ a similar account of pleasure in a more favourable context.

Abelard's writings contain no systematic treatment of sex ethics and we shall therefore conclude our exposition of his thought by examining his views on just two aspects of the subject, namely, marriage and the role of woman. In his final letter to Heloise, Abelard speaks of marriage as 'a looser life', which is permitted as a remedy for those whose weak natures prevent them undertaking 'the peril of a better' form of life, i.e. continence.<sup>91</sup> The remedy, therefore, applies especially to women whom, we have already seen, Abelard regarded as creatures of inferior nature to men. This is Paul's reason for allowing widows to remarry whether they have had only one former husband or many.<sup>92</sup> Such indulgence is not, Abelard claims, granted to men. On the contrary, the Apostle advises them not to seek a second wife. (Abelard coolly ignores the fact that advice is not equivalent to command<sup>93</sup>). The laxity of the marital state is then specified. Women should 'marry often rather than fornicate once, that if they be prostituted to one, they pay not the debt

91. Letter 8, in op. cit., p. 181.

92. Ibid, pp. 181f. Not that he discerned much value in the exercise of the Apostolic permission! In the preceding letter, he draws attention to the expression 'widows indeed' in 1 Timothy 5:3 and states that this refers to those 'who have not disgraced their widowhood with a second marriage'. (Letter 7, in op.cit., p. 120).

93. The discussion is, of course, based on 1 Corinthians, 7.

of carnal commerce to many. Albeit, the payment of this debt is not wholly free from sin, but lesser sins are allowed that greater may be avoided.<sup>94</sup> As further proof of his view that marriage necessarily involves sin and is therefore an obstacle to salvation, Abelard points to the account of the wedding at Cana. 'Only marriage', he says, 'which has an indulgence of incontinence, had the miracle of wine, wherein is luxury'.<sup>95</sup> He proceeds to cite later authorities of the church, especially Jerome whom he regards as 'the greatest Doctor of the Church and glory of the monastic profession',<sup>96</sup> in support of his view that alcohol constitutes the gravest threat to virtue and, particularly, to continence.<sup>97</sup> These traditional authorities - Scripture and the Fathers - provide a further basis, alongside of reason, for Abelard's ethics. Of course, the two elements are inseparable since most of the Fathers placed a high premium upon reason and Scripture was interpreted from this perspective. His contemporaries would not have challenged Abelard's exegesis of John's account of the wedding at Cana. This interpretation of those events really adds nothing to what the rationalist already knew on other grounds, namely that strong drink and sexual desire are conspirators against reason.

Although his account of the marital state in the letter to Heloise is perfectly consistent with his view of sexual behaviour, Abelard

94. Letter 8, in op.cit. p. 182.

95. Ibid, p. 183 (v. John 2:1-11).

96. Ibid, p. 207.

97. Ibid, pp. 183 ff.

was induced to modify it. In the Ethics he states that Paul's indulgence to the Corinthians is not 'equivalent to pardon for sin'. The Apostle merely gives 'permission to substitute a less perfect for a more perfect rule of life ... for the avoidance of fornication'.<sup>98</sup> This view conforms more exactly with the traditional position (which overlooked Augustine's more extreme statements). We may suspect that Abelard's withdrawal of his earlier view reflects the mounting pressure from his opponents who were shortly to succeed in having him condemned for heresy. However, he does not lack reason for this modification. If consent to sexual intercourse in marriage is sin then God, who has permitted this, is made a partaker in guilt.<sup>99</sup> Abelard thus allows the divine will to contravene the dictates of human reason, although his writings betray no conscious recognition of this fact and its serious implications for his ethics.

Abelard's retraction of his earlier view concerning sexual intercourse in marriage is paralleled by a similar modification in his view of man's original state in Paradise. In one of his letters he exhorts Heloise 'to pursue the celibate life of Paradise',<sup>100</sup> whereas in the Ethics he claims that the divine permission to use the marriage-bed in Paradise proves that we may not infer sin to be present whenever indulgence is granted.<sup>101</sup> There is, however, no reason to suspect that this alteration of views implies any significant change in the implications he discerns in

98. Ethica, iii.

99. cf. Ibid.

100. Letter 7, in op.cit., p. 126.

101. Ethica, iii.



woman's creation in Paradise. As well as proving that her nature is inferior to man's this shows that Paradise is woman's 'native country' and that her special role is to serve and glorify God.<sup>102</sup> However, his later view of the sexual life of Adam and Eve may mean that he would no longer tie her service exclusively to celibacy.

Woman's proper role and nobility thus has a paradoxical basis. An inferior form of human being, her Creator has designed her especially for himself. Abelard makes this paradox quite clear by stating that 'just as the sex of women is feebler, so is their virtue more pleasing to God and more perfect'.<sup>103</sup> In support of his view, he brings a massive list of authorities from classical, Scriptural and traditional sources. It will suffice for us to notice the chief characteristics of the role which Abelard assigns to women. First, because virgins receive a peculiar gift of grace which marks them as 'something special beyond the rest' of the faithful, they must be given supreme honour and be treated with notable deference. Unlike other ecclesiastical officers, their consecration, 'being more precious and so rarer', can only take place at the chief festivals.<sup>104</sup> Their monasteries must be in close proximity to the monks so that the latter may provide fully 'for the needs of the monastery, that the handmaids of Christ, solicitous for the welfare of their souls alone, may live in divine worship, and serve their own works'.<sup>105</sup> Of course

102. Letter 7, in op. cit., p. 126.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid, p. 125.

105. Letter 8, in op. cit., p. 167.

the men must be kept 'separate and far apart' out of respect for the brides of Christ. 'For God forbid that we should wish the monks, which, even to say is shameful, to be familiar with the virgins of Christ'.<sup>106</sup>

As well as being (literally) set apart for spiritual tasks, the nuns must perform 'those things only that are proper to be done within by women', such as sewing, washing, baking, milking, feeding the animals 'and what things soever women can do more conveniently than men'.<sup>107</sup>

Here we see the 'home duties' which a male-dominated society delegates to women being embodied in a spiritual ideal of femininity whose influence has yet to disappear from Western culture. Finally, and reflective of the fact that this is a male definition of the feminine, we may note that the role of women betrays some specifically masculine features. Not only are nuns made subject to the rigours of monastic life, but Abelard notes the manly character of the Biblical models of female virtue. 'And if, after Eve, we consider the virtue of Deborah, of Judith, of Esther, surely we shall blush not a little for the strength of the male sex'. Nothing can compare with the constancy of the mother of Maccabees, he says. She, 'forgetting her own nature and heedless of human affection, nor having any but the Lord before her eyes', sent her sons to martyrdom and finally won that crown for herself.<sup>108</sup> One cannot but think that

106. Ibid, pp. 166f.

107. Ibid, p. 168.

108. Letter 7, in op. cit., p. 127.

less exceptional circumstances would have offered more appropriate models of female virtue.

Heloise commences one of her letters by telling Abelard that he should not have placed her name before his own at the head of his previous letter. It is, she says, against both 'the custom in writing letters' and 'the natural order of things' to give precedence to one of inferior rank.<sup>109</sup> He replies: 'thou must understand that thou didst become my superior from that day on which thou becamest to me my lady, becoming the bride of my Lord'. By this privilege she is not only set over himself, 'but over all and sundry, the servants of that King'.<sup>110</sup> In this delicate little exchange, we may see the reflection of an 'ecclesiastical courtly culture' which had begun to emerge in western France.<sup>111</sup> By virtue of her spiritual nobility - which she, in non-courtly fashion, firmly repudiates<sup>112</sup> - Heloise qualifies as Abelard's 'superior', his 'lady'. When Abelard's contemporary prelates send adulatory letters and poems to their noble lady, they, too, make clear that her spiritual qualities constitute her supreme virtue. Since she has not only adopted the cloistered life but assumed responsibility for her sisters in Christ, Heloise is the more worthy of honour. Abelard establishes, on Apostolic authority, that the Abbot of the monastery which serves the needs of the nuns should also exercise final responsibility over them. Man is the

109. Letter 4, in op. cit., p. 61.

110. Letter 5, in op. cit., p. 71.

111. v. C. Dawson, Religion And The Rise Of Western Culture, Sheed & Ward, London, 1950, p.222 (Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh, 1948/9).

112. Letter 6, in op.cit., p.91 In one of her earlier letters she tells Abelard that 'in the whole period of my life (God wot) I have ever feared to offend thee rather than God. I seek to please thee more than Him' (Letter 4, in op.cit. p.66). As Huizinga has said, there is 'something primitive' in her 'direct passion'. Her emotions 'and the form which she expresses them in, have nothing in common with the system of courtly love which was to impose its code on the cultured world later in the same century' (in Men And Ideas, op.cit. p.187).

head of the woman. Nevertheless he must pay great respect to the Deaconness, making no decisions without consulting her, ordering nothing except through her, and always obeying her summons and seeking to fulfil her requests.<sup>113</sup> For she has forsaken 'the filthiness of carnal pleasures' in order to raise spiritual instead of worldly children. Now, therefore, she is 'more than a woman, who transcendest men even, and has turned the curse of Eve to the blessing of Mary'.<sup>114</sup>

One further aspect of Abelard's advice to Holoise as Deaconness<sup>115</sup> calls for attention. Referring to the Apostolic letter to Timothy, he notes the prudence by which maturity of age is required in deaconesses. The purpose is 'that not only to their lives but also to their great age, proved in many things, may reverence be paid'. Also, Abelard claims, it is necessary 'to remove all occasions of quarrelling' and such might occur were the younger preferred in appointments to high office. Their seniors might properly feel jealousy.<sup>116</sup> This somewhat trivial piece of teaching reveals much of the character of reason's appreciation of the natural. The latter is respected and supported insofar as it conduces to good order. But those elements of nature, such as the sexual drive and desire for food and drink, which are potentially disruptive must be

113. Letter 8, in op. cit., pp. 165-168.

114. Letter 5, in op. cit., p. 81.

115. Abelard preferred the term 'Deaconness' to 'Abbess' because the former has apostolic (Biblical) approval and corresponds to the true nobility of the office which consists in service (v. Letter 7, in op. cit., p. 121).

116. Letter 7, in op. cit., p. 123.

brought under the regulation of reason. Hence, while longevity can provide the basis of a regulation, Abelard states that 'the use of flesh and wine, like that of marriage, is considered intermediate between good and evil, that is, indifferent. Albeit, the use of the marriage tie be not wholly free from sin, and wine be more perilous than all other foods'.<sup>117</sup> In effect, then, reason makes the natural ambivalent and, following the principle 'divide and conquer', uses 'nature' to support its conclusions where possible and denies it where this seems necessary or expedient. Reason is thus the perfect servant of an institutional church for it enables the latter to identify itself with the given order of life in society as well as to claim authority of a transcendent order. However, this renders the principle by which the church operates - reason or grace - ambivalent, since it appears, now in harmony with the given order of life, and now in opposition to it. Thus, however great its power over the world, its own integrity (ratio) finally becomes questionable. When the Reformers challenged the rampant power of Rome on the issue of grace, they were also demanding that 'the natural' (including the rational element) be permitted to remain itself, i.e. undivided.

We began our enquiry into Abelard's ethics with the expectation that his theological emphasis on God's goodness and love, together with his account of their exemplary character, would bear fruit in a new appreciation of the value of persons. This is not entirely lacking. In the Ethics, the basis of his attack on the theoretical and practical abuses of ecclesiastical office is that God's justice is flouted and men

117. Letter 8, in op.cit. pp. 192f.

presume to make their own will the criterion of satisfaction for sin.

But there appears alongside of this a strong plea for true charity which will acknowledge and support the penitent in his need.<sup>118</sup> Heloise is exhorted to encourage her charges to care for one another's needs. She who does so may 'greatly rejoice, when in the need of her sister she shall enjoy the fruits of charity, or see herself to be living not for herself alone but for others'.<sup>119</sup> Even here, however, the individual's concern for his own welfare or virtue remains paramount. Charity may go beyond what reason demands, but it is never permitted to challenge the ethical order established by reason. Hence the proper task of charity remains to direct the individual soul to its highest Good. God's claim to man's love (charity) is thus conceived to compete with other claims upon man's affection. One of Abelard's letters contains an unwitting instance of this competitive character of charity. Of Heloise's continuing bitterness over the manner of their conversion to the cloistered life, he says that 'the more perilous it is to thee, wearing out thy body and soul alike, (it) is so much the more miserable and grievous to me'. But he quickly demonstrates that his is no sympathetic suffering. If she truly wants to please him, she must lay aside this bitterness and cease to torment him. Otherwise she will not attain with him 'to blessedness'.<sup>120</sup> In other words, all that can now unite them is a similar pursuit of salvation, or like charity whereby each forsakes the other in order 'to be solicitous for

118. *Ethica*, *xxv* and *xxvi*.

119. Letter 8, in *op.cit.*, p.197.

120. Letter 5, in *op.cit.*, p.77.

the welfare of (his) soul'.<sup>121</sup> Abelard's schematic individualism is tempered by his understanding of charity but the latter is never justified if it threatens the individual's self-concern.

In his survey of medieval history, Friedrich Heer suggests that the dispute between Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux represents the beginning of the schism between the head and the heart of European man.<sup>122</sup> We may add that Abelard's attitude to sexuality indicates a similar cleavage within himself. The intellect, supported by theological tradition, sets out to conquer the affective components of human nature. Although the traumatic conclusion of his liaison with Heloise must have contributed to the violence of the attack, it did not initiate the struggle for the supremacy of reason, nor did it determine the manner in which he reacted to this personal crisis.<sup>123</sup> Hence his intellectual principles must bear part of the responsibility for those features of his thought, such as the denigration of marriage and the respect for virginity, which would have earned the approval of Jerome, the Father whom he most admired.

While Abelard's theological and ethical views reinforce the monastic estimate of sexual behaviour, they also possess less conservative implications. By making intention the criterion of moral worth, Abelard endows man with an inviolable autonomy. Under certain conditions, a

121. Ibid, p. 75.

122. F. Heer, The Medieval World, op. cit., p. 79.

123. cf. sup. p. 250 and note 22.

person who has not been baptized may enter the kingdom of heaven. The acts of penance which the church prescribed are similarly dispensable.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, Abelard was not seeking to undermine the rites of the medieval church. He criticized the uncharitable and unjust treatment of penitents, but, at the same time, he recognized that the penitential system could be a means of encouraging men to conform to the will of God. In short, his defence of personal integrity was balanced by an appreciation of the order which ecclesiastical structures imparted to the Christian life.<sup>125</sup> Thus he discerned no necessary conflict between the autonomy of the moral agent and the monastic virtue of obedience. Provided that we are not required to violate our moral principles, he tells Heloise, 'it is far better for us to do well, than to do good. Nor ought we to consider what is done as in what manner or spirit it is done. A thing is well done which is done in obedience, even if what is done seems to be least good.'<sup>126</sup>

Although we must disagree with those who claim that Abelard foreshadows the Protestant mind,<sup>127</sup> we should not under-estimate the significance of his critical attitude to traditional ideas and practices. He was seeking both to purge the ecclesiastical system and, as Mary McLaughlin has said, to reinvigorate the spiritual life of Christendom.<sup>128</sup> To this task he brought a breadth of vision which is most apparent in the authority which

124. cf. sup. p. 255 and note 38.

125. v. esp. *Ethica*, xxv and xxvi.

126. Letter 8, in *op.cit.* p. 176.

127. v. sup. p. 260 and note 54.

128. v. Abelard As Autobiographer, *op.cit.* p. 480.



he confers on 'outstanding wise thinkers' who were not themselves servants of the Christian church.<sup>129</sup> Thus his writings reflect the growing vitality of medieval culture and the restoration of confidence in the power of reason which, as we have already suggested, were creating the possibility of a more constructive treatment of social responsibility. When we examine the work of Hugh of St. Victor, one of Abelard's contemporaries, we shall discover that theology was beginning to lay hold of its new opportunity.

129. cf. sup. p. 246.

## ETHICS AS SACRAMENT : Hugh of St. Victor.

A passion for 'the conflicts of discussion' led the youthful Peter Abelard to the cathedral school of Notre Dame where the study of dialect was encouraged by William of Champeau, the archdeacon of Paris.<sup>1</sup> The new arrival soon began to attract attention by his display of intellectual prowess and, since William was extremely jealous of his reputation for learning, the two men duly became bitter enemies. When the archdeacon later relinquished his office and assumed the habit of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine<sup>2</sup> Abelard was among those who attributed his move to personal ambition.<sup>3</sup> Whatever William's motives may have been, however, his action proved to be of great benefit to the medieval church and its theology. For the monastery which he founded at St. Victor, on the outskirts of Paris, quickly became an important centre of piety and scholarship. The credit for the success of St. Victor belongs in part to Hugh, a German who entered the newly-founded monastery in order to complete his novitiate<sup>4</sup> and eventually became

1. Hist. Cal., i and ii. Looking back upon this period of his life, when he was 'perambulating diverse provinces in search of discussion', Abelard describes himself as 'an emulator of the Peripatetics'. However, the analogy which he draws between the 'weapons' of the philosopher and those of the soldier inclines us to agree with Huizinga that he is best described as the "knight errant" of scholasticism (J. Huizinga, Men And Ideas, op. cit., p.169, cf. Mary M. McLaughlin, op.cit., pp. 481f.).
2. In 1110 or thereabout.
3. Hist. Cal., ii.
4. In 1115 or soon after.

one of its most influential teachers.<sup>5</sup>

The contemporaries of Hugh of St. Victor described him as 'the tongue of Augustine'.<sup>6</sup> However, his contribution to medieval theology involved more than a fresh appreciation of the ideas of the African Doctor. In his major work, the De Sacramentis,<sup>7</sup> Hugh attempted to provide a systematic and comprehensive exposition of Christian doctrine and so produced the first summa of medieval theology. This expansion of the theological task is accompanied by a more intensive treatment of matters which had previously been subjects of merely occasional interest. Thus the De Sacramentis contains 'the first full and general discussion of the theology of marriage in Christian literature'.<sup>8</sup> The scope of Hugh's work indicates the support which theologians could give to the church as it strove to extend its influence over medieval society.

5. Hugh began teaching about ten years after joining the School and became its head in 1133. Other leading Victorians were Richard, Andrew and Adam. Richard, who became prior in 1162, took a keen interest in the literal meaning of Scripture and, as Hugh had done, he stressed the sacramental import of the chief events in Biblical history. Although he shared Anselm's opinion on the relationship between faith and reason, Richard elaborated a rigorous argument for plurality within the Godhead. Andrew, who was probably taught by Hugh, was the greatest exegete that the School produced. He became the Abbot of Wigmore in Herefordshire. Adam, who died in 1192, made a worthy contribution to the liturgical and devotional poetry of the period.

6. They also said that Bernard of Clairvaux was 'Augustine revived' (v. J. Huizinga, *op.cit.*, p.195).

7. The appearance of this work coincided with his elevation to leadership of the School. Most of our quotations from the De Sacramentis will be found in Roy J. Deferrari, Hugh of St. Victor on the Sacraments of the Christian Faith, The Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951. Since this translation is rather stilted, however, we have used Fairweather's version of Book One, Part Eight (v. E.R. Fairweather, ed. and trans., A. Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham, L.C.C., vol X, S.C.M. London, 1956, pp. 300-318).

8. D.S. Bailey, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

A coherent presentation of the principles of the Christian faith would legitimize the authority of the church and help to determine its limits, while a thorough examination of matters which the church sought to rule would improve its juridical competence. Although he was reputed to be 'another Augustine', then, Hugh played a creative part in the development of medieval theology. His respect for traditional views made him suspicious of the dialectical method<sup>9</sup> but the De Sacramentis, with its grand scale and its attention to temporal affairs, proves that he shared the optimistic attitude which is characteristic of the twelfth century. To the Gothic mind it seemed that reason could discern the harmony of God's world and erect a system of thought which would impart order to the life of man.

The significance of the De Sacramentis is not exhausted by its place in the history of theology. The work possesses an intrinsic value because of the principle which Hugh employs in order to unite the varied subjects with which he deals. His thought is founded upon the conviction that mundane reality is filled with symbols of the will of God. Even the act of creation, which is a direct effect of the divine will, bears a hidden and transcendent meaning. God 'ordered the rational creature which He had made in part to persist in its purity; in part, joining it to corporeal coverings and earthly habitations, He caused slimy matter to quicken to the feeling of life,

9. cf. E.R. Fairweather, in L.C.C. vol. X, op.cit., p.225

this, indeed, having been proposed as a pattern of the future society which was to be realized between Himself and rational spirit unto its glorification'. In other words, it was 'shown that what body was to spirit then in foundation', so the spirit would ultimately 'be to Him according to its worthiness'.<sup>10</sup> On the basis of this sacramental view of the world, then, Hugh proceeds to describe the means by which God achieves his purpose of salvation. He does so by tracing the Biblical account of creation and redemption and, as the title of his work indicates, he pays special attention to the sacraments of the church which represent the crucial events in the drama of salvation. Thus his view of the world is not as static as his symbolic interpretation of reality might at first suggest. From Augustine he has derived an awareness of the historical form of the Biblical record and, for this reason, he begins to recognize that the ambiguities and conflicts of the human situation reflect the dynamics of existence and cannot be simply dismissed as the products of human sinfulness.

Since much of Hugh's theology consists of a recapitulation of views which we have considered in our analysis of the thought of Augustine, our introduction to his treatment of the sacrament of marriage can be rather brief. In common with his patristic authority Hugh contrasts the nobility of man's mind with the baseness of his physical nature. Man is the microcosm of the universe. In him 'a kind of earth placed below is the sensual nature' and 'heaven placed

10. De Sac. I, vi, 1.

above' is 'the purity of intelligence and reason animated by a kind of movement of immortal life'. Between the conflicting desires of the body and the spirit reason must intervene, 'as a mediatrix', to ensure that 'lower corruption' does not 'infect the higher purity of the soul' and that the 'integrity which is above' does not incline toward those base and worthless things which are below'.<sup>11</sup> Provided that reason fulfils its task, the rational spirit will arrive at the goal which God has set before it. For God 'created rational spirit so that He might make it a sharer in that good which He Himself was, and by which He Himself was happy'.<sup>12</sup>

This Augustinian eudaemonism produces an individualistic conception of the Good. 'You do not love (God) unto His own good, but you love Him unto your own good, and you love that good of yours'. 'Therefore, when you love God, you love for yourself'.<sup>13</sup> Of course, this love is not a crude form of selfishness. Charity means that 'you do not envy with reference to your neighbour the good which you love'<sup>14</sup> and that, where the love of God is concerned, 'you do not seek something in exchange for the fact that you love'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Hugh does insist that love which is desirous of its own good is the form of charity and thus equates an existential phenomenon with the divine order of being. 'God requires this first from you, that you give your soul to Him, then that you add the rest'.<sup>16</sup>

11. Ibid, I, i, 19.

12. Ibid, I, vi, 1; cf. I, ii, 4.

13. Ibid, II, xiii, 7.

14. Ibid, II, xiii, 6.

15. Ibid, II, xiii, 8.

16. Ibid, II, xiii, 10. In other words, love of neighbour is secondary.

Love of God leads necessarily to love of neighbour but the latter is an inferior mode of concern and, on this account, is in danger of being overlooked. Hence the second of the great commandments had to be given.<sup>17</sup>

Since this commandment is derivative it must be interpreted in terms of the love of God which is its source.

The Christian should only love those whom he judges to be faithful to God or capable of such faith. 'When we love these, either we love God in them, because they are good, or we love and long for God in them, since they can be good which they are not'.<sup>18</sup> However, 'evil spirits' and 'those men who have already been damned with evil spirits' are beyond the pale of the love which, in accordance with the design of creation, longs to return to its Creator.<sup>19</sup>

Within the framework of God's world there is no room for evil. It is an epiphenomenon, associated with the human will but devoid of independent reality. 'For to be (evil) is not to be something, but not to be that which should have been is something'. Obedience to God is 'what should have been' and, since the will bears the responsibility of complying with the divine commands, evil is nothing more than 'a fault in the rational will'.<sup>20</sup> The manner in which Hugh proposes to identify evil is as Augustinian as his account of its 'place' in the created order. The evil will disturbs the beauty of creation by allowing desire and action to extend beyond

17. De Sac. II, xiii, 6.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid, II, xiii, 6-8.

20. Ibid, I, vii, 16.

their proper limits, that is, to exceed their measure.<sup>21</sup> This occurs either when apparent but unreal goods are sought or when the way in which goods are sought is immoderate or unreasonable.<sup>22</sup> The validity of this description of evil depends upon a static view of the world. Unless the order of goods has been established once for all, it is impossible to determine the merit of the will by referring to the relative value of its potential objects. If the possibility is maintained, the ethical order assumes the form of a hierarchy. The ladder of virtue ascends from the realm of matter to the spiritual kingdom of heaven. Those who stand on the lowest rung are not fit to participate in the love of God or of his loyal subjects, whereas those who have reached the higher rungs deserve to be recognized as the spiritual and moral elite of mankind. This 'royal priesthood' has earned the right to exercise authority over the children of God in all matters which pertain to their spiritual welfare. Thus ethics provides part of the fabric of an institutional church.

Evil, then, is both disobedience and disorder. It possesses this twofold nature because man, in whom it arises, has been endowed with two ruling principles. These are 'desire for the just and desire for the beneficial'. The former is the source of human autonomy. Unlike its counterpart, which is inescapable, it is 'voluntary', that is, subject to the control of the will.<sup>23</sup> Therefore

21. Ibid, I, vii, 15; cf. I, vii, 21f.

22. Ibid, I, vii, 21f.

23. Ibid, I, vii, 11.



Hugh agrees with Augustine that the will is the arbiter of human destiny. If it conforms to 'the will of its Creator, which is its form and exemplar and the designed rule which it should follow',<sup>24</sup> it will bring man 'unto glory'; if it 'should abandon . . . the desire for the just', it will bring him 'unto punishment'.<sup>25</sup> This conception of justice, which includes something of the Biblical conception of human freedom, shatters the neo-Platonic ethical scheme, with its complacent view of the soul's return to its divine source.<sup>26</sup> In spite of his attempt to establish a scale of value, which would eliminate the anxiety of self-determination, Hugh required man to prove his essential love of God by freely choosing to engage in the struggle for obedience. This aspect of his ethics is imbued with the ethos of monasticism.

When man accepts the challenge of justice he begins to acquire merit which is the means of appropriating God's promise of spiritual replenishment. Hugh claims that this view of the Christian life does not exclude the operation of divine grace. For 'it was more for highest goodness to give both merit and reward than reward alone without merit'.<sup>27</sup> Unless man is assisted by 'the Spirit of Christ',

24. Ibid, I, vi, 4.

25. Ibid, I, vii, 11. In this statement 'it' refers equally to the mind, to its principle of movement, the will, and to the being whom it moves, man.

26. We do not intend to disparage the Platonic view of the spiritual life. The Platonists realized that it was difficult to achieve union with the ground of being. However, the presupposition of their quest was the essential harmony of the spiritual order to which the soul belonged. Hence they regarded justice as a matter of insight, not of obedience.

27. De Sac. I, vi, 6.

which is received through the sacraments,<sup>28</sup> he cannot advance in virtue because he 'can neither receive knowledge of truth nor resist the concupiscence of the flesh'.<sup>29</sup> This prevenient grace is not, as it was for Anselm, an aspect of divine justice. Owing to sin, human nature was so corrupt that 'there would not have been injustice, had it been wholly condemned. But grace came and chose some from the mass of mankind through mercy for salvation, while it left others for condemnation through justice'.<sup>30</sup> With Augustine, then, Hugh affirms that the grace of God in Christ is self-determining. It creates its own conditions, enabling the man of faith to transcend his disposition to evil and to live in hope of eternal life when 'the excellence of divine contemplation' will replace 'that knowledge whereby God absent is now sought in faith'.<sup>31</sup>

Man has need of divine grace because his nature has been vitiated by the original sin of Adam. In Adam, Hugh states, 'the spirit swelling with pride against the Creator did not keep obedience and, therefore, the Creator to avenge His injury punished the spirit with ignorance indeed but the flesh with concupiscence'.<sup>32</sup> Prior to his disobedience Adam possessed a direct knowledge of God

28. Ibid, II, ii, 1. Hugh maintained that there were seven sacraments of the Christian church. However, he realized that baptism and the Eucharist were of fundamental importance. Baptism mediated knowledge of Christ and thus made men members of his body, The church. The Eucharist mediated love of Christ and thus quickened the members of the body. In other words, these sacraments were the means which the Spirit used in order to unite the body of Christ and to vivify the members.

29. De Sac., I, vii, 35.

30. Ibid, I, viii, 7.

31. Ibid, I, vi, 14.

32. Ibid, I, vii, 27.

'through inspiration'.<sup>33</sup> In spite of the emphasis which Hugh places upon the autonomy of the will, such knowledge renders that first act of human defiance incomprehensible. This helps to explain the tendency to blame the woman rather than the man for the sinful condition of mankind. Thus Hugh characterizes female reason as prudence, which 'looks upon bodily and visible things', and male reason as wisdom, which is 'intent solely upon divine and unseen things and conforming itself to the divine will'.<sup>34</sup> Since woman is inferior and, therefore, 'subject to man',<sup>35</sup> the devil shrewdly 'attacked human nature in that portion where it seemed weaker'.<sup>36</sup> Through her spiritual weakness the woman failed to repudiate the claims of the devil. 'She herself, then, to some extent began malice, who gave to the tempter the boldness of iniquitous persuasion'.<sup>37</sup> Adam completed what she began 'lest by resisting her will and petition he might offend the heart of the woman who had been associated with him through the affection of love'.<sup>38</sup>

The disobedience of 'our first parent' was not only 'the first of all sins' but 'the origin of all subsequent sin'. For it provoked God to afflict human nature 'with a twofold corruption, namely, the mind with ignorance, and the flesh with concupiscence',<sup>39</sup> and from these two vices 'grew the stock of all

33. Ibid, I, vi, 14.

34. Ibid, I, viii, 13.

35. Ibid, I, vii, 5.

36. Ibid, I, vii, 3.

37. Ibid, I, vii, 4.

38. Ibid, I, vii, 10.

39. Ibid, I, vii, 26.

subsequent evils'.<sup>40</sup> However, concupiscence is a more radical vice than its counterpart. In a passage which recalls the expressions of Augustine, Hugh identifies the primal disorder in the elements of human nature with concupiscence: 'by a just recompense he who did not wish to be subjected to his superior through obedience subjected himself through concupiscence to his inferior, so that he now finds this the medium of division between himself and God, not the mediator of reconciliation'.<sup>41</sup> If human nature had been utterly disrupted it would have perished, so God mercifully ordained that 'the rational spirit' should retain control over all members of the body except 'the one through which offspring was to be engendered in the flesh'. This means that exorbitant carnal desire always accompanies 'the intercourse of the flesh' and, therefore, that it forms a reliable means of transmitting original sin from one generation to the next.<sup>42</sup> Concupiscence is also the source of the soul's ignorance. Although Hugh describes ignorance as 'the punishment of pride',<sup>43</sup> which is a spiritual phenomenon, he does not suggest that it is imposed directly upon the soul. Ignorance is a vice because it is a product of 'corrupted sense';<sup>44</sup> it originates 'in the corruption

40. Ibid, I, vii, 31.

41. Ibid, I, ix, 3.

42. Ibid, I, viii, 13.

43. Ibid, I, vii, 31.

44. Ibid, I, vii, 34.

of the flesh and in the corruption of the carnal sense; this carnal sense, if it had its integrity, promoted and exercised, would take on without labour the judgement of truth instructed by those things which were seen externally'.<sup>45</sup>

Hugh had to establish a casual connection between concupiscence and ignorance because in contrast with Augustine, he was sure that human souls are not transmitted from fathers to children. Rather, 'new souls created from nothing are daily infused for quickening into new bodies formed in the womb from the paternal semen'.<sup>46</sup> This conception of the generative process raises two difficult questions: first, 'how through flesh alone without soul sin passes from father to son; second, how the soul becomes a participant in that sin which descends through flesh alone and in flesh alone'.<sup>47</sup> In response to the second question, which concerns the justice of guilt by association, Hugh can only plead ignorance: 'we must in the end confess what is true, that divine justice is in truth irreprehensible in this but is not comprehensible'.<sup>48</sup> His discussion of the former problem is more interesting.

The flesh is infected with 'the vice of concupiscence',<sup>49</sup> because it has been subjected to mortality as a punishment for

45. Ibid, I, vii, 32.

46. Ibid, I, vii, 30. This statement implies that semen is the agent which transmits original sin from the parents to the child. Although Hugh overlooked this function of the semen when he wrote the *De Sacramentis*, he drew attention to it in some of his shorter works (v. J.B. Kors, *La Justice Primitive Et Le Péché Original D'Après S. Thomas*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1930, p.49).

47. De Sac., I, vii, 30.

48. Ibid, I, vii, 35.

49. Ibid, I, vii, 34.

the sin of Adam.<sup>50</sup> The corruption inherent in the mortal state requires the body to extend its desire in order to restore and preserve its health.<sup>51</sup> However, 'this is what is called concupiscence of the flesh itself, namely the natural desire of affection transgressing order and going beyond measure'.<sup>52</sup> Although 'carnal concupiscence' is a necessary effect of mortality, it involves guilt because the necessity derives from the disobedience of Adam's will.<sup>53</sup> This argument for the sinfulness of the flesh is based on a dubious distinction between spiritual and carnal desire. The former is a movement of 'the mind' and is specifically located 'in the will', whereas the latter is a movement of 'sensuality' which is the human pleasure principle.<sup>54</sup> Although these movements are related to different objects, they may possess a common source in the affection of man, and if this is so, Hugh has mistaken a spiritual for a physical vice. In spite of the naturalistic terms of his discussion, however, he has begun to recognize the anxiety which underlies man's varied

50. Ibid, I, vii, 31.

51. Ibid, I, vii, 19.

52. Ibid, I, vii, 31.

53. Ibid, I, vi, 23. Thus guilty acts merely confirm the prior guilt which the individual shares with every other member of the human race (De Sac., I, vii, 31).

54. De Sac., I, vi, 4. There is a third principle of movement in man. It belongs to the body and becomes apparent 'in work'. In contrast with the movement of sensuality, which has been swollen by original sin, the movement of the body 'follows the movement of the will'. In other words, sensuality cannot govern human behaviour without the acquiescence of the will.

attempts to establish and preserve his security. Man senses that he is a stranger in a hostile world and is tempted to provide himself with a home by creating his own system of salvation. Loyalty to the Augustinian doctrine of original sin prevented Hugh from observing that this idolatry is manifested in all spheres of human activity from the sensual to the religious and the political. In other words, Hugh did not realize that original sin is universal because it affects the whole of man, as well as every man.

On account of man's first act of rebellion against his Creator, then, his will has to contend with 'an opposing movement of sensuality' which seeks to usurp control of 'the movement of the body', that is, to direct the actions of man.<sup>55</sup> In effect, this analysis of the human situation outlaws a part of human nature. The physical appetites, and the sexual drive in particular, are subjected to a spiritual disqualification which, though it is more subtle than a Manichaeic dualism, is almost as radical. After the apologies have been made, therefore, we must agree with Kierkegaard that the principle of sensuousness was introduced into the world by Christianity.<sup>56</sup> Thus the theologian may admit that there is a legitimate order of carnal desires but his account of original sin transforms this order into an impossible ideal. For the flesh of man is born with the necessity of concupiscence,<sup>57</sup> a necessity which is demonstrated

55. De Sac. I, vi, 4.

56. S.Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 59 ff.

57. De Sac., I, vii. 31.

by the unruly behaviour of the organs of generation.<sup>58</sup>

This doctrine of original sin possesses grave implications for an ethic of marriage. All acts of sexual intercourse must be accompanied by concupiscence in order to guarantee the transmission of original sin.<sup>59</sup> When these acts take place within the marital context, however, the vice is diminished, although it cannot be obliterated. The remedial value of marriage consists in its ability to restrain the 'ardor of immoderate lust from unrestrained coition by limiting it under definite law of one compact' and to excuse 'this ardor which would by itself be evil, through the blessings attached to itself'.<sup>60</sup> The legitimacy of marital intercourse is enhanced if the partners share the Christian faith. For 'the sacrament of redemption' removes the guilt, but not the punishment, of original sin.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the 'necessity of desiring' remains 'a fault' but the evil is imputed to the offspring alone. Through what is now considered to be a blameless defect in the act of the parents the infant acquires a latent concupiscence which, in the strict sense of the term, is a vice.

This distinction between the guilt and the penalty involved in sexual intercourse is exceedingly dubious. For absence of

58. Ibid, I, viii, 13.

59. Ibid

60. Ibid, II, xi, 7. Hugh adheres to Augustine's list of the marital blessings. This includes faith, hope of progeny, and sacrament.

61. De Sac., I, vii, 24 and 31. Baptism is the sacrament to which Hugh is referring.



guilt seems to render imposition of punishment logically impossible. The suffering which ensues from a miscarriage of justice is not penal but tragic. Similarly, the effects of punishment, which may survive the expiation of guilt, cannot be described as punishment. Hugh virtually concedes this argument when he states that concupiscence remains in believers in order that 'they may be exercised'.<sup>62</sup> A trial is not a punishment but a process which decides whether punishment is required. In other words, it is meaningless to tell a man that the pleasure which he derives from sexual activity is a punishment which implies no guilt,<sup>63</sup> but it does make sense to say that the enjoyment of such pleasure involves a test of his faith in God. The implication of Hugh's conception of grace then, is that believers are no longer bound by concupiscence. In order to preserve the universality of original sin, however, Hugh had to admit that concupiscence retained a slight hold on believers.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, he clearly intended to prove that

62. De Sac. I, vii, 24. By means of divine grace believers are able to resist concupiscence (De Sac., I, vi, 16).

63. Such a statement would be psychologically absurd as well as illogical.

64. If grace eradicated concupiscence, members of the church would not transmit original sin to their children.

grace set them on a moral plane which was above the reach of unbelievers. This may appear to be an innocuous form of discrimination but we need to remember that the medieval church was acquiring powers which enabled it to practise what it preached. We shall discover that Hugh encouraged ecclesiastical courts to treat unbelievers with a disrespect which will have induced many sceptical minds to accept the faith which the church proclaimed.

Hugh agrees with Augustine that the blessings which attach to marriage and which excuse the indulgence of concupiscence are fidelity, hope of progeny, and sacrament.<sup>65</sup> Augustine considered that marriage derived its sacramental character from the permanence of the bond between husband and wife. Unless one of the partners committed adultery, marriage was indissoluble and thus "a certain sacrament of some greater matter".<sup>66</sup> Augustine had no occasion to elaborate the symbolism of marriage but, by the time Hugh was writing, matrimony had become one of the seven official sacraments of the church. Even if Hugh had not sought a sacramental interpretation of the whole of mundane reality, then, he was bound to pay more attention to the sacramental aspect

65. De Sac., II, xi, 7; cf. Augustine, De Grat. Christ. et de Pecc. Orig., II, xxxix; De Nupt. et Conc., I xlii.

66. De Bono Conjug., vii, 6. In view of Ephesians 5:31f. we may presume that the 'greater matter' is the relationship between Christ and the church. Augustine will have used this obscure expression because he was reluctant to admit that marriage, which reflected the 'weak mortal state of man', could symbolize a profound truth of the spiritual life.

of marriage than his patristic authority had done. Although this sometimes led him to speak of marriage in terms which seem to be at variance with those used by Augustine, Hugh might still claim that he was merely applying the Father's views to a different situation.

From the De Sacramentis we learn that there are three outstanding features of a sacrament of the Christian church. In brief, these are instruction, practice and humiliation. By visible means a sacrament enables man to apprehend spiritual truth or to discern 'the invisible virtue' which is the essence of the sacrament. Practice of the sacraments is a means of involving man in 'works of virtue' and humiliation occurs because man, who once refused to be subject to God, now discovers that he must subject himself to inferior, worldly things in order to become obedient to God. Thus the sacraments are divine means of combatting sin. Through them man receives 'interior edification' or grace and exercise in virtue. No longer need his actions be restricted to 'works of iniquity' and 'works of necessity' or labour.<sup>67</sup>

Since the Scriptures teach that matrimony was instituted prior to the onset of original sin, Hugh realizes that humiliation was not an original mark of this sacrament.<sup>68</sup> It was established 'for a sacrament and a duty only - for a sacrament for the sake of

67. *De Sac.*, I, ix, 3.

68. *Ibid.*, I, viii, 12.

instruction, for a duty for the sake of practice. For there were these two elements in matrimony - the state of matrimony itself and the duty of matrimony - either of which was a sacrament. Matrimony consisted in the consent of the bond of fellowship, the duty of matrimony consisted in the union of the flesh'.<sup>69</sup> Augustine had stated that the undivided association of husband and wife was the 'substance' of the sacrament of marriage.<sup>70</sup> This helps to explain the distinction which Hugh draws between the sacrament and the duty of matrimony. Hugh emphasized this distinction because it enabled him to assert that the only essential feature of marriage is 'the bond of fellowship'. Thus he was able to deny that sexual intercourse, which has been corrupted by sin, is a necessary element in the marital state.<sup>71</sup> In order to place this aspect of his thought in its proper context, however, we must first examine his conception of the original form of marriage.

Both the state and the duty of matrimony possess sacramental significance. The former, the unbroken association which is the essence of matrimony, is 'the sacrament of a certain spiritual fellowship between God and the soul through love, and in this

69. Ibid, I, viii, 13.

70. De Nupt. et Conc., I, xii.

71. e.g. De Sac., II, xi, 3.

fellowship the soul is the bride and God is the bridegroom'. The duty of matrimony, the union of the flesh, is 'the sacrament of a fellowship between Christ and the Church, which was to come about through the flesh which he was to take upon himself, and in this fellowship Christ was to be the bridegroom and the Church was to be the bride'. As these statements imply, the husband assumes 'the image of God in this sacrament'. This establishes the order of precedence within marriage. Ignoring all empirical evidence, Hugh contends that the superiority of the man is reflected in the nature of his love. He is 'inclined toward love by kindness' whereas the woman, who symbolises 'the rational soul', is 'moved to love rather by necessity and, as it were, by the consideration of some advantage'.<sup>72</sup> This account of marital love pays too much attention to the divine role of the sacrament (the thing which is signified) and too little to the human role (the object which signifies). For this reason Hugh fails to appreciate that the different ways in which husband and wife express love for one another arise from a common sense of need. In this discussion of marital love Hugh also manages to contradict what he elsewhere says concerning the nature of human love.<sup>73</sup> Instead of being oriented to God the love of

72. Ibid, I, viii, 13.

73. v. sup. pp 290f..

the husband is God-like, a gracious response to the needs of the wife.

In spite of the contrast which he discerns between male and female love Hugh insists that marriage is a state of 'mutual love'.<sup>74</sup> The sincerity of this conviction is confirmed by his exposition of the Biblical account of woman's creation from the side of man.<sup>75</sup> 'For since she was given as a companion, not a servant or mistress, she was to be produced not from the highest or from the lowest part but from the middle. For if she had been made from the head, she would have been made from the highest and she would seem to have been created for dominion. But if she had been made from the feet, she would have been made from the lowest and she would seem to have been subjected to slavery. She was made from the middle, that she might be proved to have been made for equality of association'.<sup>76</sup> We may query the validity of allegorical exegesis but we can hardly deny that Hugh has grasped one important element in the story which the Yahwist, the ancient Hebrew writer, told of woman's creation. In another section of the De Sacramentis Hugh argues that woman was taken painlessly

74. De Sac., I, viii, 13.

75. Genesis 2: 18-25.

76. De Sac., II, xi, 4; cf. I, vi, 35.

from the side of the sleeping man in order to prove that her creation was not a punishment for his weakness.<sup>77</sup> While this contention provides further evidence of his belief in the fundamental harmony of man and woman, it also reveals his confidence in the self-sufficiency of man. One aspect of the Biblical story which he therefore fails to notice is its emphasis on man's need of woman. Man wants a 'helper' and so God mercifully provides him with woman before whom, in wonder and joy he cries: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'.<sup>78</sup> Since he could not appreciate that it is 'not good that the man should be alone',<sup>79</sup> Hugh was prepared to raise the question which many of his predecessors had asked concerning God's failure to pronounce that the creation of man and woman was good. He gives the usual answer: 'Perhaps, because the number two is a sign of division, which is the first to depart from oneness'.<sup>80</sup> Of course, division does not entail disorder because man possesses an ontological superiority over woman. He not only plays the part of the imago Dei in the sacrament of matrimony, a role which is confirmed by his procreative activity,<sup>81</sup>

77. Ibid, I, vi, 36.

78. Genesis 2:23.

79. Genesis 2:18

80. De Sac., I, i, 20.

81. v. sup. p. 297.

but he is the representative of wisdom, whereas the woman is the representative of prudence.<sup>82</sup> Hence Hugh can conclude his interpretation of woman's creation from man by saying that 'in a certain way she was inferior to him, in that she was created from him'.<sup>83</sup> Thus the allegorical hermeneutic allows him to assert what, on other grounds, he must. Nevertheless, he should be given credit for a genuine attempt to defend the integrity of marital love, although it leads to a complementary, rather than a mutual, form of relationship between the sexes.

Owing to the disobedience of Adam 'the mingling of the flesh' is invariably accompanied by 'that carnal concupiscence of the flesh which still remains in the flesh of sin'.<sup>84</sup> For this reason Hugh suggested that the sacrament of that association which exists between Christ and Church might be transferred from 'carnal intermingling' to 'the compact of association' or to the 'undivided association' of husband and wife, in which case 'the sacrament of that association which exists between God and soul' would be found in 'conjugal love'.<sup>85</sup> Although he does not bring

82. De Sac., I, viii, 13.

83. Ibid., II, xi, 4.

84. Ibid., II, xi, 7.

85. Ibid., II, xi, 8. Another reason for this suggestion will have been his desire to maintain that the virgin parents of Christ participated fully in the sacrament of marriage (cf. De Sac., II, xi, 5 where he notes that Augustine and Ambrose asserted that the marriage of Joseph and Mary was genuine and complete).



this matter to a firm conclusion, he is convinced that the absence of 'carnal commerce' does not upset the validity of marriage. On the contrary, this renders marriage more sincere. For 'the bond of flesh' is now only admitted as 'a matter of indulgence and compassion lest the vice of concupiscence. . . might pour forth disgracefully into every excess'.<sup>86</sup> With the absence of sexual intercourse the practical and the humiliating aspects of the sacrament of matrimony lose their significance and an alternative means of symbolizing the relationship between Christ and the church has to be found. Hugh claimed that the woman alone was in danger of forfeiting the sacrament of Christ and the church.<sup>87</sup> We may presume that he expected the man to retain the image of Christ by loving his wife 'as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Ephesians 5:25).

Since Hugh considers that 'the bond of flesh is with marriage' but 'is not marriage of itself',<sup>88</sup> he tends to devalue the marital blessings, faithfulness and hope of progeny, which are associated with this bond. If these blessings are present, he states, marriage becomes more chaste and more fruitful but their absence does not destroy marriage. A woman does not cease to be a wife

86. De Sac., II, xi, 3.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

if she is an adultress; her marital status is rather a precondition of her adultery.<sup>89</sup> This intriguing argument against divorce on the ground of adultery indicates that Hugh could speak of human beings in quite static terms. Although his statement concerning the adulteress is semantically correct, it does not imply that adultery has no effect on the reality of marriage unless one presupposes that no occurrence in the history of marriage can cause the relationship between man and wife to be severed. Therefore Hugh has to admit that adultery cannot rob marriage of its sacramental significance.<sup>90</sup> This depends on the bare fact of the association between husband and wife. He does seem to have been dissatisfied with this conception of the sacrament because he stipulates that the marital bond should be founded upon 'charity of souls burning mutually and perseveringly'.<sup>91</sup> Such love must include faithfulness, which Hugh defines as careful avoidance of adultery.<sup>92</sup> This subtle and yet commendable attempt to do justice to the marital relationship is the product of a conflict between an ecclesiastical and a theological conception of marriage. The former located the sacrament in the 'undivided association' of

89. Ibid, II, xi, 8.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid, II, xi, 7.

man and wife whereas the latter sought to quicken this association by interpreting it as an image of the divine life.

Some of our contemporaries would criticize Hugh for his failure to make hope of progeny an essential element in marriage.<sup>93</sup> Although we do not share that aversion to sexual intercourse which accounts for Hugh's estimation of procreation, we are inclined to agree with him that desire for offspring is not a necessary part of marriage. If it were, people who have learned that they cannot produce children would have to be excluded from the marital association. They should not be offered a marriage which is abnormal and incomplete, nor should they be advised that 'childlessness is a misfortune which has to be endured as such',<sup>94</sup> because such remarks are calculated to increase their misery.<sup>95</sup> As Hugh of St. Victor realized, they should be offered a marriage which lacks nothing essential. For the creativity of the marital relationship cannot be defined in biological terms alone.

In so far as the sacrament of marriage is located in the association of one man and one wife it is common to the whole of mankind. However, Hugh readily agrees with Augustine that

93. v.e.g. E. Brunner, op. cit. p. 368

94. Ibid, note 16 on p.653.

95. The advice will have been intended to increase the fortitude of childless couples. This prompts us to ask whether we should 'sin that grace may abound' (cf. Romans 6:1).

Christians alone 'possess the sanctity of the sacrament'.<sup>96</sup> For 'participation in spiritual grace which is received' in a sacrament is reserved for those 'who through faith have been made members of Christ, and through charity have been united to God internally by the mind and devotion'.<sup>96</sup> For this reason Hugh is prepared to question the validity of marriages contracted by unbelievers. Although 'the sacraments of God are in themselves always true', he writes, 'for those who treat and receive them unworthily they are not true'. He goes on to say that 'the law of matrimony' is nullified by 'injury to the Creator', by which he appears to mean that the marital bond can be dissolved if one partner refuses to accept its Christian interpretation. Hence he allows a Christian to separate from an unbeliever even if the latter wants to maintain the marriage.<sup>97</sup> Here we have an indication of the pressure which the church was able to exert against nonconformists when it took control of matrimonial affairs. Neither the intention nor the welfare of a non-Christian spouse was bound to be taken into consideration by an ecclesiastical court.

In order to secure the competence of ecclesiastical courts the medieval church had to determine the conditions of a valid

96. De Sac., II, xi, 8 and 13.

97. Ibid., II, xi, 13.

marriage. Hugh pays a great deal of attention to this task but the need of legal precision does not prevent him from considering the personal needs of those who are entering into a relationship of 'mutual love'. Since marriage is basically an association or partnership, it 'is consecrated by a compact of mutual agreement, when each by voluntary promise makes himself debtor to the other, so that thereafter he neither passes over to association with another, while the other is living, nor disjoins himself from that which is established reciprocally'.<sup>98</sup> The importance which Hugh attaches to the free decision of each partner implies a lofty conception of personal integrity and therefore indicates a significant advance in the creation of Western culture. The feudal lord is deprived of his right to limit the marital choice of his subjects or to force marriage upon them.<sup>99</sup> Of course, this does not mean that Hugh was directly opposed to social distinctions. He recognized that society was composed of different classes and that it was impossible to divorce a person's character from his station. Hence he asserted that a free man could dismiss a slave if the status of the latter had been concealed until

98. Ibid, II, xi, 4.

99. On the feudal regulation of marriage v. G.G. Coulton, The Medieval Village, pp. 82f., 250 and Appendices 14 and 15. The opposition which the church offered to feudal practice was often weak and ineffective.

the marriage took place. Such a marriage was null and void because the deception of one party deprived the other of information which he would want to take into account.<sup>100</sup>

Since marriage is founded upon mutual consent, it begins at betrothal. Even if there are no witness, a man and a woman become consorts as soon as they agree to marry one another 'and thereafter, unless some cause for parting arise,<sup>101</sup> they cannot be separated from each other licitly, even if on account of the secret consent, if they should deny the deed, they could not be refuted'. Witnesses are necessary because their confirmation of the marriage helps to maintain order in this sphere of human affairs. Strictly speaking, however, they are not essential because the validity and, therefore, the sacramental character of marriage depend entirely upon 'the conjugal pact'.<sup>102</sup>

This conception of the basis of marriage allows the validity of unions sealed before witnesses and ratified by the church to be called in question. For one of the partners may have secretly consented to marry another. In that case the church would be sanctioning adultery. On the other hand, anyone who wanted to obstruct or to dissolve a marriage could plead a prior commitment.

100. De Sac., II, xi, 19.

101. A marriage could be dissolved on such grounds as the consanguinity or the affinity of the partners. Hugh devoted several chapters of the De Sacramentis to a discussion of these complicated and restrictive aspects of matrimonial law. (On the traditional view of consanguinity, v. sup.pp. 197f, note 104).

102. De Sac., II, xi, 5. The final phrase belongs to Ambrose whom Hugh quotes as follows: "Not the deflowering of virginity but the conjugal pact makes marriage".

In that case, marital affairs would lapse into anarchy. Hugh considers that this is the greater danger and therefore advises the man who has betrayed another to remain with his wife. If he repents, he can cast his cares upon God by praying as follows: 'I prefer to fall into your hands than into the hands of men, since power is present with you and pity is not lacking. Man cannot change the law. The law does not dominate you since you are the founder and Lord of the law. Man judges deeds, not the will; you are indulgent towards deeds on account of the will'. By relying on his own good will and on the mercy of God, then, this man can happily submit to the ecclesiastical law and thus avoid tempting his weaker brethren to seek divorce. Hugh summarizes his argument by saying that 'in manifest affairs scandal should be guarded against and regarding hidden things recourse should be had to grace and mercy'.<sup>103</sup>.

In order to reach this conclusion Hugh has to disregard some of the most important elements in his theory of marriage. These include the sacramental and the voluntary aspects of the matrimonial agreement and the notion of personal responsibility which is implicit in that agreement. By permitting a compact which is declared in public to cancel one which was made in

103. De Sac., II, xi, 6.

secret Hugh jeopardizes the sacramental significance of marriage. For he was inclined to think that 'the compact of association' symbolized the unity which had once for all been established between Christ and the church. Unless the matrimonial agreement is unique, the symbolism vanishes. The voluntary basis of marriage is undermined by the suppression of relevant information. If a slave who conceals his condition from his partner nullifies the matrimonial agreement, a man who conceals a previous compact does so too. The individual is advised to decline all responsibility for the fate of his first consort and to submit to the ruling of the church. Instead of making his own assessment of the situation the basis of his action, he should act according to the dictate of the church. Thus, the danger of scandal, which is but one factor in the situation, determines his course. This result is achieved by denying the historicity of God's mercy and by resorting to ethical subjectivism. Although the mercy of God can be apprehended, it cannot become a principle of human action. It merely invites trust.<sup>104</sup> Although the good will of man can be a principle of action, it can also be a substitute for action. When the laws of the church are unable to cope with the complexity of a human situation, then, the man of good will need not defy them because he can trust in the mercy of God.

104. In other words, charity is God-orientated rather than God-like. v. sup. pp. 290f..



It might be thought that Hugh could have avoided the problems which arise during his discussion of the basis of marriage by slightly modifying his notion of consent. Instead of saying that marriage began when mutual consent was given, could he not have said that it began when public announcement of such consent was made? This would allow the cancellation of any secret agreement and prevent the church from confirming unions which were adulterous. Hugh will have been loath to alter his views for two reasons. First, he will have been aware of the danger of disturbing traditional ideas and practices; secondly, he realized that the more formal consent becomes, the less it manifests such important features as uniqueness and freedom. Although he considered that witnesses were needed to confirm a marriage, then, he refused to grant them a part in its creation.

In spite of the criticism which we have levelled at Hugh's conception of the basis of marriage, we should recognize that much of what he says has more than legal value. By means of his sacramental interpretation of marriage he is able to appreciate the importance of the vows<sup>105</sup> which husband and wife exchange. As the Incarnation was an event in which God proclaimed his faithfulness to man and the faith of the church which he adopted is a word embodied in an event, so an agreement to marry is a deed which cannot be obliterated. It

105. Hugh does not use this term to describe the formation of marriage. He considered that a vow was directed exclusively to God.

becomes part of the history of each party, an inviolable element in the personality which each bears into the future. To deny it, therefore, is to act falsely, to betray both the other and oneself. Thus neither party can forsake the other in order to conclude a similar agreement with another. The two outstanding features of the vow, then, are its binding character and its singular object. Hence it is more closely allied to the monogamous ideal than the union of the flesh which, despite its deep significance, does not exclude the possibility of polygamy.<sup>106</sup> The vow can also give indirect support to the monogamous ideal. For it transcends the immediate context of a personal relationship. Although it is directed primarily to the other and may be given in secret, it does not require the privacy that is usually associated with sexual intercourse. Hence the vow can introduce an element of public accountability into marriage and become a means of securing adherence to the marital norm of society. Those who marry take the responsibility of conforming to an ideal, not just for their own sake, but for the sake of society. Performance of this task would earn social approval, whereas failure would incur disgrace. The emphasis which Hugh and other theologians placed on the public observance

106. Thus polygamy was condoned in ancient Israel (v. Genesis 16:1 ff; 30:1ff.)

of marriage may be taken to indicate that monogamy was difficult to maintain unless it was supported by the pressure of public opinion.

The significance which Hugh attributes to the 'compact' on which marriage is based, is, in part, an effect of his catastrophic version of the Fall. Since 'the bond of flesh' has been vitiated by concupiscence, it can hardly be a fundamental principle of marital society. Hugh's conception of original sin also influences the manner in which he proposes to deal with someone who secretly agrees to marry and is later betrayed. First, however, we may note that Hugh presumes this person to be a woman.<sup>107</sup> This assumption arises from his doctrine of sexual love. Whereas a man loves a woman 'through kindness', her love is directed to him 'by necessity'.<sup>108</sup> Hence she would never transfer her affection to another and, even if she did so, he would not object. Kindness might well cause him to bestow love upon another and, in that case, his former beloved is bound to suffer.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, Hugh considers that she should be treated with the utmost severity. She 'must be forced into continence'. Since she did not marry openly, 'it is just that

107. De Sac, II, xi, 6.

108. Ibid, I, viii, 13.

109. Some contemporary theologians base their argument for monogamy on a similar analysis of sexual love. v. e.g. H. Thielicke, The Ethics of Sex, op. cit., pp. 79-98.

she endure punishment' and thus 'become an example of correction and a caution to other women, lest they presume likewise'. This advice reveals a deep-rooted hostility to women inasmuch as the man, who does not need a woman's love, is allowed to have it but the woman, who needs the love of a man, is denied it. Hugh justifies this harsh treatment by means of his doctrine of original sin. 'If someone....should ask how a woman who has not sinned can be forced into continence against her will, he should see that this too is of the misery of the flesh, and he who does not check himself from its voluptuousness in prosperity is worthy of bearing its pains also in adversity'.<sup>110</sup> Hugh has discovered a fine means of recruiting nuns!

Our analysis of Hugh's theology has revealed an element of confusion in his understanding of the sacramental life. The sacraments are supposed to encourage man to obtain grace and virtue by means of a 'praiseworthy humility' which does not repudiate the employment of earthly things.<sup>111</sup> Thus mundane affairs are involved in the drama of salvation and receive creative theological interpretation. In the light of God's redemptive activity marriage appears to be something more than an association whose essential purpose is procreation. It becomes a relationship of mutual love and must therefore be founded

110. De Sac., II, xi, 6.

111. Ibid, I, ix, 3.

on the free choice of each partner. Whatever may have prompted Hugh to develop a sacramental theology,<sup>112</sup> then, there can be no doubt that his view of the world was productive of valuable ethical insights. However, his sacramentalism can also serve a more conservative purpose. For much of what he learned from Augustine implied that the sacraments were means of transcending the world instead of transforming it. They might be described as a set of spiritual ladders which enable the mind of the individual to escape 'the vice of concupiscence' and to attain wisdom or the rapt contemplation of God. Thus theology tends to neglect temporal affairs and prefers to dwell on the promise of eternal beatitude. Although 'the chastity of nuptials' is admitted, it is deemed inferior to 'the chastity of celibates',<sup>113</sup> and consorts are therefore exhorted to emulate the latter.<sup>114</sup>

We have observed that Hugh rarely lost an opportunity to consult the interests of the medieval church. Since ecclesiastical courts required a comprehensive definition of marriage, he sought to determine the conditions under which the sacrament should be performed. He argued that a marriage could not be recognized unless it was based on voluntary consent and was confirmed by witnesses. Thus he encouraged the church to rectify the disorder which had surrounded matrimonial affairs while they

112. The immediate occasion must have been meditation upon the sacraments of the church.

113. De Sac., II, xi, 10.

114. e.g. Ibid, II, xi, 3 and 4.

were in the hands of feudal lords. However, he also encouraged the church to take undue advantage of the increase in its powers. Augustine had conceded that unbelievers could contract a genuine marriage but that did not prevent Hugh from claiming that they should be penalized for their failure to perceive the sacramental nature of the marital relationship. In certain circumstances, therefore, ecclesiastical courts could be expected to dissolve a marriage which had been formed by unbelievers. Those who wanted to guarantee the stability of their marriage would have to join the church. In short, Hugh allowed the church to promote its cause by conferring privileges on its own members.

We have yet to discuss the propriety of including marriage among the sacraments of the Christian Church. Since we agree with Paul Tillich that a religious community 'is free to appropriate all symbols' which convey something 'of that reality on which the community is based',<sup>115</sup> we consider that Hugh was entitled to regard marriage as a sacrament. For he maintained that the association of husband and wife could mediate an appreciation of the relationship which Christ had established between God and man. Furthermore, he did not claim that marriage was one of the essential symbols of Christian faith. Baptism and

115. P. Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. III, op.cit., p. 131.

the Eucharist were indispensable because they assured man of salvation, whereas marriage and other sacraments were useful because they contributed to his sanctification by enabling him to practise virtue and to acquire 'a fuller grace'.<sup>116</sup> This conception of marriage is also vindicated by some of its ethical consequences. It persuaded a monastic theologian that there were elements of intrinsic worth in the conjugal state. Although he insisted that a man who had sexual intercourse with his wife was succumbing to original sin, he did not teach that marriage was a mere remedy for human weakness. Its sacramental import proved that it was a means of participating in the charity which Scripture has enjoined on us all. By means of his sacramental view of the world, then, Hugh did manage to improve the theological estimate of marriage. However, his account of marital love still left much to be desired. Hence we shall not be surprised to discover that some of his contemporaries were subscribing to a most unorthodox theory of sexual behaviour.

116. De Sac., I. ix, 7. Another kind of sacrament is ordination which prepares a man to celebrate other sacraments.

## B. THE CHALLENGE TO THE TRADITION.

-7-

## THE ETHOS OF COURTLY LOVE: Poetry and Romance.\*

Our analysis of medieval theology has revealed that Anselm of Canterbury stands on the threshold of a period in which respect for traditional ideas was matched, and sometimes threatened, by a desire for intellectual originality. A somewhat precocious confidence in the resources of the human mind, supported by faith in the God whose Son had accomplished a spiritual redemption of a select portion of mankind, enabled theologians to display a depth of insight and breadth of vision which had seldom appeared in the work of their monastic predecessors. Anselm seeks to penetrate the mysteries of the Incarnation and to relate the God-Man's work of salvation to the dynamics of human existence; Peter Abelard, with his keen sense of personal integrity, challenges the institutional body of Christ to purify its pastoral activities; and Hugh of St. Victor envisages the world as the embodiment of a divine purpose. These varied

\*Quotations from the lyrics of the troubadours have been taken from R. Nelli et R. Lavaud (eds), Les Troubadours, vol. II, Desclée De Brouwer, Bruges, 1966. Since the translations are mine, I considered that the original should be rendered in full. This also serves to indicate the style of the courtly lyric. The translations of the Minnesangers' lyrics may be found in M.F. Richey, Medieval German Lyrics, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1958. In the notes I refer to the first verse of the relevant poem and to the numbers of the strophes and the verses which have been cited.



endeavours were undertaken with an assurance which testifies to the growing strength and influence of the medieval church and with an optimism which reflects the renewed vitality of medieval culture.

The cultural revival of the twelfth century has been described as a 'renaissance' but, as Huizinga argues, the term is misleading, since it suggests that respect for classical forms of expression rather than enthusiasm for new models was the mood of the age.<sup>1</sup> The century which produced Peter Abelard was imbued with his spirit of adventure and its enterprise paved the way for the achievements of the following century. While theologians, assisted by canon lawyers such as Gratian, were preparing for the advent of scholasticism, craftsmen were developing the skills which would translate the aspirations of

1. v. J. Huizinga, Men and Ideas, op. cit. pp. 181-183, cf. A. Scaglione, Nature And Love In The Middle Ages, University of California Press, 1963, pp. 163f., note 32, where J. Michelet's view that the twelfth century witnessed a Renaissance avortée is described. Scaglione seems to agree with this view (cf. Ibid, pp. 24 ff.). R. Briffault, Les Troubadours Et Le Sentiment Romanesque, Les Editions Du Chêne, Paris, 1945, p.172, note 25, is prepared to apply the term renaissance to the twelfth century. A short bibliography of this debate is supplied in E.R.Fairweather (ed.), A. Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm To Ockham, L.C.C., vol. X, London, S.C.M. Press, 1956, p.220, note 1.

Christendom into the splendours of Gothic art and architecture.<sup>2</sup>

This expansion of intellectual and aesthetic horizons was due in part to a marked improvement in the material welfare of society. Trade and commerce began to flourish and this not only facilitated the interchange of ideas but led to the growth of towns, especially in Italy and northern France. A 'new being', the bourgeois or townsman, began to establish himself as part of the structure of European civilization. The shop-keeper was attracted to the town by the prospect of economic advancement. He was followed by the student, who came in search of the mental stimulation which the town was able to afford. Many towns therefore became important centres of learning and their schools, which were usually attached to a cathedral, proved to be the fore-runners of a new type of academic institution, the university. A significant contribution to the comprehensive education which the university sought to provide was made by Islamic and Jewish scholars who, during the eleventh and twelfth

2. Although the greatness of the Gothic style was not fully revealed until the thirteenth century, the old west porch of the cathedral at Chartres had been carved by the middle of the twelfth century. For an intriguing study of the relationship between medieval art and religious belief v. E. Mâle, The Gothic Image, (trans. by D. Nussey), Collins, The Fontana Library, 1961.

centuries, had translated and interpreted numerous classical texts, most of which were Arabic editions of the works of Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> Further legacies of the medieval town were the commune, a corporation to which all the citizens of a town belonged, and the gild, a society whose members shared a specific interest. The emphasis which these institutions placed upon social responsibility and the maintenance of law and order supports the claim that urban conditions promoted a 'Christianization' of social life in the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental principles of the commune were religious and it is therefore no surprise to find Viollet le Duc identifying the Gothic style with the communal ethos.<sup>5</sup> In addition, we may note the inspiration which Thomas Aquinas, with his appreciation of the order which should prevail in a Christian society, and Dante, through loyalty to his native Florence, derived from the communal mode of life.

3. The most influential Islamic philosophers were Avicenna (980 - 1037), Avicbron (c. 1020 - 1058), and Averroes (1126 - 1198). The teaching of Averroes made a deep impression on the early generations of students at the University of Paris, the first of the new academic foundations. Maimonides (1135 - 1204) was the foremost Jewish philosopher of this period.
4. This view was shared by Weber and Troeltsch, v. C. Dawson, Religion and The Rise Of Western Culture, Sheed And Ward, London, 1950, pp. 193 f.
5. v. C. Dawson, op. cit., p. 202.

The audacious spirit of the twelfth century also found poetical expression. Much of the verse which William, ninth duke of Aquitaine and seventh count of Poitiers, was producing at the beginning of the century was in the ribald vein of chivalry but a few of his lyrics strike the first notes of a new theme in Western poetry and literature. To appropriate the first line of one of these poems -

Faraí chansoneta nueva -

he was 'making a new song' which, since it was fostered by the nobility, has been designated the courtly lyric. The originality of this verse was twofold: it was composed in the vernacular and was devoted to a lofty conception of heterosexual love. Both features imply a repudiation of prevailing notions of medieval culture. The unity of Christendom, based on the universality of the Latin tongue, is undermined and the spiritual value of the sexual relationship is asserted. There is evidence that this challenge to the principles of Christendom was quite deliberate. Thus the Angevin court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine (grand-daughter of William) and the court of Champagne (where the countess, Marie, was one of the two daughters of Eleanor and her first husband, Louis VII of France) encouraged poets to make Arthurian and other Celtic legends ('the matter of Britain') the framework of their courtly

romances because this was a means of opposing their particular ideals to 'the old Franco-German idea of a holy Empire with Charlemagne as its patron saint'.<sup>6</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, who worked at the court of Champagne<sup>7</sup> between 1160 and 1172, begins 'his book about the Knight of the Court' (Lancelot) with the acknowledgement that 'the material and the treatment of it' were supplied by the Countess.<sup>8</sup> Antagonism to the ascetic definition of the spiritual life appears to have been a factor in the appearance of courtly motifs, such as esteem for the lady who is the object of desire, acceptance of a 'test' or 'proof' of the courtier's love, and appreciation of the mutual joy which love confers, in the later works of

6. F. Heer, The Medieval World, op. cit., p.130. Each of the three great 'cycles' of medieval romance was based on legends which had enveloped a historical figure. In addition to 'the matter of Britain' there was 'the matter of France', which related the exploits of Charlemagne and his knights, and 'the matter of Rome', which focussed attention, not on the Caesars, but on Alexander the Great. Nearly all medieval romances belong to one of these series.
7. The court was located at Troyes. It was near this town that Peter Abelard established the oratory which he 'named Paraclete'. v. Hist. Cal., x, xi.
8. Lancelot, in vv. 1-30: v. Chrétien de Troyes, Arthurian Romances, (trans. and ed. by W.W. Comfort), Dent: London, Everyman's Library, 1963 (1914), P.270. (Future references to Chrétien's works will provide the block of verses in which the quoted passage occurs, followed by the relevant page of Comfort's edition). Although the ascription with which Chrétien introduces his Lancelot may be a sign of his distaste for its adulterous theme (cf. inf., p.390 ), it certainly indicates that patrons gave more than economic assistance to their poets.

William of Poitiers.<sup>9</sup> In 1103 Robert d'Arbrissel, a mystic of some renown, founded an abbey at Fontevrault which belonged to the territories of the gallant duke and count. This was a mixed community, ruled by an abbess, and anyone who wished to join was required to put his or her chastity to the test by spending a night in the naked company of a member of the opposite sex. Among those who presumably passed this test were a number of noble ladies, including Bertrade de Montfort, the countess of Anjou and former mistress of Philippe I of France, and two former wives of William of Poitiers, Ermengarde and Philippa. The success of Robert d'Arbrissel's venture at Fontevrault made a profound impression on William. This is reflected in his poems, one of which contains a reference to an 'abbey of prostitutes'.<sup>10</sup> Sarcasm gives way to argument in the following verses of a more courtly song -

9. The remainder of this paragraph is based on the analysis of R.R. Bezzola, Les Origines Et La Formation De La Littérature Courtoise En Occident (500-1200), Deuxième Partie, La Société Féodale Et La Transformation De La Littérature De Cour, Tomes I et II, Bibliothèque De L'École Des Hautes Études, Librairie Honoré Champion, Paris, 1960, pp. 268 - 315. However, we do not agree with Bezzola that William of Poitiers incorporated all the essential elements of the courtly theme into his verse. cf. inf., pp. 342ff..
10. This phrase has been remembered even though the poem has been lost.

Qual pro y auretz, dompna conja,  
 Si vostr'amors mi deslonja?  
 Par que-us vulhatz metre monja  
 Et sapchatz, quar tan vos am,  
 Tem que la dolers me ponja,  
 Si no-m faitz dreg dels tortz qu'ie-us clam.

Qual pro y auretz s'ieu m'enclostre  
 E no-m retenetz per vostre?  
 Totz lo joys del mon es nostre,  
 Dompna, s'enduy nos amari.<sup>11</sup>

(What will you gain, fine lady, if you dismiss me from your love?  
 It seems you want to be a nun. Yet know, I love you so much, that  
 I fear grief will crush me, if you do not render justice to my complaint  
 What will you gain, if I enter a monastery and do not remain yours?  
 All the joy of the world is ours, lady, if we love one another).

William's message is clear: man is able to attain felicity through  
 submission to the will of a 'domna' or mistress without joining the  
 monks at Fontevrault.

By the end of the twelfth century this message had been  
 received in most of the courts of Europe. In the lands of the  
langue d'oc, the Old Provençal language, countless troubadours  
 followed in the wake of the ducal poet. They transmitted the

11. Farai chansoneta nueva, str. 4 and 5, vv. 19-28.

courtly lyric to the trouvères of northern France, who wrote in the langue d'oïl. (Old French), and the 'new song' was soon heard on the lips of the Minnesänger in Germany.<sup>12</sup> The trouvères were responsible for the development of a new genre, the courtly romance, which contained a series of chivalric and amorous adventures and was usually composed in rhymed octosyllabics.<sup>13</sup> Although the poetic form of the romance heightened the danger of monotonous repetition, freedom from the rigid conventions of lyric poetry increased the scope of artistic invention and the skill of such writers as Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France<sup>14</sup> earned the admiration of many noble audiences. Above all, however, the aristocracy was impressed by the content of romantic literature. For the poets gave expression to values which enabled the ruling class to maintain its sense of identity during a period of political and economic change. Thus the ideals of chivalry were reaffirmed, devotion to a beloved lady replaced obedience to the church, and gentility,

12. The Minnesänger were influenced chiefly by the trouvères - 'thus Friedrich von Hausen shows direct knowledge of six trouvère poems, but of only one troubadour poem' (O. Sayce, ed., Poets Of The Minnesang, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1967, p. xii).

13. Our knowledge of Marie is very limited. She seems to have been a native of Normandy and may have composed her lays around 1175 at the court of Henry and Eleanor in England.

14. This was 'the classical form of the courtly romance' (R.R. Bezzola, op. cit., p. 548). In Ibid, Troisième Partie, La Société Courtoise: Littérature De Cour Et Littérature Courtoise, Tome I, 1963, pp. 149 ff., Bezzola traces the formal development of the courtly romance from the 'chansons de geste' through Wace, who recorded the history of the English court, and other poet-historians.



which contrasted favourably with the greed of the bourgeoisie, became a mark of nobility.

#### A. The Origins of Courtly Love.

While the approval which courtly society conferred on the work of its poets can be readily explained, the sources from which the troubadours derived their lyric are difficult to ascertain. The sudden advent of the courtly lyric has prompted many scholars to investigate the origins of the troubadour's art but, in spite of the linguistic competence and the breadth of literary knowledge which they have frequently displayed, they have reached a variety of conclusions. Since the specialists have failed to produce a definitive account of the origins of the courtly lyric, a less competent critic is tempted to follow the example of Joseph Coppin who introduces the work of the troubadours without discussing its antecedents and claims that this procedure is valid because 'Ce qui nous intéresse surtout, c'est le contenu de cette poésie'.<sup>15</sup>

However, interpretations of 'the content of this poetry' have sometimes been influenced by theories which purport to reveal its sources and, for this reason, the different hypotheses

15. J. Coppin, Amour Et Mariage Dans La Littérature Française Du Nord Au Moyen-Âge, Librairie D'Argences, Paris, 1961, pp. 33 - 35.

deserve a brief examination.<sup>16</sup>

Denis de Rougemont has argued, 'in a vigorous, though brilliantly amateurish fashion',<sup>17</sup> that the troubadours were the representatives of an 'Oriental underground', which was established in the 'free south' of France by Paulician and Bogomil sectarians who had been driven out of Bulgaria, and which covertly propagated its heretical views under the guise of poetry.<sup>18</sup> In order to substantiate his thesis de Rougemont compares the doctrines of the southern heretics, or Cathars, with the attitudes which inform the lyrics of the troubadours. He finds that the heretics and the poets agree to despise marriage, glorify chastity, and prefer death to the attainment of wealth.<sup>19</sup> Since analogous opinions do not imply

16. The following works have formed the basis of our investigations:- R.R. Bezzola, *op. cit.*, Deuxième Partie, pp. 183 - 203, 246 - 326; R. Briffault, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 - 68; D. de Rougemont, *L'Amour Et L'Occident*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1939, pp. 69 - 120 (English translation: *Passion And Society*, by M. Belgion, Faber & Faber, London, 1962); R. Nelli, *L'Erotique Des Troubadours*, Edouard Privat, 1963, pp. 21 - 77; C. Dawson, *Medieval Essays*, Sheed And Ward, 1953, pp. 211 - 238 - 'The Origins Of The Romantic Tradition'; A.J. Denomy, *The Heresy Of Courtly Love*, The Declan X. McMullen Co. Inc., New York, 1947. When the theories of other scholars are mentioned a general reference to the publication in which they are presented will be provided.
17. A. Scaglione, *op. cit.*, p. 157, note 7.
18. D. de Rougemont, *op. cit.*, pp. 49ff. This thesis has been advocated by other scholars and de Rougemont refers to the investigations of E. Wechssler (e.g. pp. 72f.) and O. Rahm (e.g., p. 78). However, de Rougemont has justly become the best-known advocate of the 'Catharist' theory.
19. D. de Rougemont, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 - 100.

identity of belief, this account of the origins of the courtly lyric remains dubious. Nevertheless, de Rougemont is convinced that romantic literature has introduced an alien element into the culture of Christian Europe and he proceeds to blame the passion which artists continue to extol for the disastrous conflicts of love and war which have bedevilled western civilization. The basis of his argument is an analysis of Gottfried von Strassburg's romance of Tristram and Yseult<sup>20</sup> which he regards as the consummate statement of the courtly ideal.<sup>21</sup> In this work an elite of 'noble spirits' (edele herzen) is exhorted to free itself from the shackles of the material realm and to pass through the barrier of death to a realm of spiritual being where the weary soul can find peace. This conception of the spiritual life is diametrically opposed to the respect for the

20. Following A.T. Hatto, I use 'Tristram' and 'Yseult' for general references to the famous lovers, 'Tristan' and 'Ysolt' for references to the romance of Thomas of Britain, and 'Tristan' and 'Isolde' for references to the romance of Gottfried von Strassburg, v. Gottfried von Strassburg, Tristan, with the Tristram of Thomas, (trans. by A.T. Hatto), Penguin, 1960, p. 7.

21. Since de Rougemont's interpretation of the courtly theme precedes his analysis of its origins, we may suspect that the latter has been unduly influenced by the former. We may also note that de Rougemont ignores a number of non-courtly features which appear in Gottfried's romance. Thus the following motifs are absent: freedom of choice in love, secrecy, the pre-eminence of the lady, mundane pastimes, and an appreciation of the physical aspects of love. On the other hand, Tristan's marriage and the rivalry of Isolde's husband are motifs which do not usually occur in a courtly romance. cf. A. Scaglione, op. cit., pp. 20 and 162, note 23.

temporal order which, de Rougemont ingeniously assures the reader, the Christian church, with its doctrines of creation and incarnation, has always upheld. Although this is a perceptive analysis of the romantic ethos, it is a tendentious interpretation of courtly literature. For the passion which de Rougemont denounces was also repudiated by many of the lyric poets<sup>22</sup> and, when it did appear, it derived, not only from the new conception of love, but from chivalric notions which were deeply embedded in medieval culture.<sup>23</sup> In short, de Rougemont's exposition of the courtly theme is based on

22. e.g. Marcabru, who lived during the first half of the twelfth century and whose patrons included the son and successor of William of Poitiers and Aquitaine and Alphonse VII of Castille and Léon. Marcabru initiated the use of the trobar clus, a device 'whose aim was to veil the thought by the ambiguity of the expressions' (Alfred Jeanroy, quoted in de Rougemont, op. cit., p. 80). De Rougemont argues that the 'school' of the trobar clus was seeking to disguise the heresy of catharism but Nelli rightly observes that a sufficient reason for Marcabru's employment of the new device is his opposition to aristocratic sensuality (v. op. cit., pp. 108 - 118), and Dawson refers to the work of Arment Daniel, which was composed between 1180 and 1210, in order to show that the use of the trobar clus tended to degenerate into an intricate jeu d'esprit. (v. Medieval Essays, op. cit., p. 217).
23. De Rougemont regards this as further proof of his thesis (v. op. cit., pp. 113 ff). However, Celtic mythology may be heresy but it is not an alien ingredient in Western culture.

evidence which is too narrow.<sup>24</sup>

The lyric of the early troubadours is so mature that most scholars seek its origin in an established poetic tradition. Those who are anxious to prove that romantic literature forms an integral part of Western culture have tended to regard the popular poets of medieval Europe as the precursors of the troubadours. However, no one has managed to demonstrate that the various kinds of 'May-song'<sup>25</sup> or the ribald Latin verse of

24. Another heretical source of courtly literature is suggested by A.J. Denomy in The Heresy Of Courtly Love (op. cit.). Denomy thinks that The Art Of Courtly Love, written by Andrew The Chaplain at the court of Champagne (v. Andreas Capellanus, The Art Of Courtly Love, (trans. by J.J. Parry), Frederick Ungar, New York, 1959) proves that the new ideas on the sexual relationship were derived from the teachings of Avicenna (v. sup. p. 327, note 3). Although this thesis is less extravagant than the one that de Rougemont advocates, it involves a number of tenuous presuppositions. We cannot be sure that Andrew the Chaplain is an altogether reliable source of information since he may have set the courtly ethos in an ideological framework which, though it is fairly appropriate, does not reveal the source of the poets' inspiration. Furthermore, he may have intended his work to be a veiled polemic against the new form of eros (v. D.W. Robertson Jr., The Subject of the De Amore of A. Capellanus, in Modern Philology, vol. L, no. 3, February, 1953; cf. inf., pp. 367f. and note 142). Finally, Denomy cannot maintain the analogy between the courtly and the philosophical ideals without exaggerating the impersonality of the lady who is the object of desire (cf. inf., p. 350). Denomy's estimation of courtly love may be inferred from the title of his book.
25. René Nelli thinks that the Andalusian and Occidental forms of May-song were factors in the emergence of the courtly lyric (v. op. cit., pp. 24 - 40). However, he does not suggest that these were the only important influences on the poets who developed the new form (cf. pp. 21 - 24, 40 - 77). Gaston Paris placed great emphasis on the May-songs in his account of the origins of courtly verse. v. Revue des Deux Mondes, mais, 1896.

the goliards (clerici vagi or 'wandering scholars') were transformed into the courtly lyric. Alfred Jeanroy contended that this failure was due to the loss of vernacular poems which were inspired by the nobler sentiments of the goliards<sup>26</sup> but it seems most improbable that a unique type of composition was completely forgotten until he resolved to discover an autochthonous source of the courtly lyric. A more plausible explanation of the refined art of the troubadours is offered by Robert Briffault. Since such essential features of the courtly lyric as the identification of love with desire and the patterns of metre and rhyme had previously appeared in Arabic love-songs, Briffault maintains that the troubadours acquired their art from poets at the courts of Moorish Spain.<sup>27</sup> Although the reliance which this theory places on analogous characteristics has been criticized,<sup>28</sup> Briffault corroborates his basic argument by showing that religious and political discord did not prevent Christian courtiers from sampling the refinements of Moorish society.<sup>29</sup> Hence we are

26. A. Jeanroy, Les Origines de la poésie lyrique en France, Champion, Paris, 1925, et al..
27. R. Briffault, op. cit., pp. 23 - 48.
28. v. e.g., R. Bezzola, op. cit., Deuxième Partie, pp. 183 - 203.
29. R. Briffault, op. cit., pp. 49 - 68.

inclined to think that the 'new song' of the troubadours may well be a variant of an alien courtly lyric.

It is, however, possible to exaggerate the influence which the Arabic model exerted upon the troubadours and, in so doing, to overlook part of the significance of the courtly theme. Thus Briffault, who imagines that he has discovered the only important source of the courtly lyric, advances a very superficial interpretation of the new literary phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> He argues that the content of the courtly lyric, the interest of the patron, and the function of romantic notions, all prove that the aim of the troubadours was simply to disguise aristocratic sensuality.<sup>31</sup> With regard to the content of the courtly lyric Briffault informs us that the troubadours replaced the Islamic conception, whose mystical and Platonic overtones they were unable

30. So, too, does Christopher Dawson, another advocate of an Arabic origin. In his Religion And The Rise of Western Culture, op. cit., pp. 181 - 190, he emphasizes the exotic character of 'courtoisie' and adds that it was an unusual cultural phenomenon because it lacked roots in the soil or in religious inspiration. Nevertheless, he admits that it has continued to influence Western culture. Had he paid more attention to its association with the vernacular, with the chivalric ideal, and with political and religious aspirations, he would have found those roots in the soil and in religious inspiration which help to explain the impact which it can still make on the mind of Western man.
31. R. Briffault, op. cit., v. esp. pp. 73 - 80, 87 - 111.

to appreciate,<sup>32</sup> with an alternative which was 'franchement sensuelle'.<sup>33</sup> Descriptions of the lover's desire to kiss and caress his mistress, preferably when she is naked, indicate that 'nos poètes s'expriment sur ce point avec une crudit  qui n'a   vrai dire d'analogue dans aucune autre litt rature'.<sup>34</sup>

This argument is patently absurd. The troubadours invariably equate love with unfulfilled desire and they never imitate the crude sensuality of the goliards.<sup>35</sup> Briffault is almost as far from the truth when he suggests that aristocratic patrons were only interested in the aesthetic value of the courtly lyric.<sup>36</sup> As we have already seen, the ruling class had good reason to appreciate the novel doctrine of love, as well as the consequent

32. Ibid, pp. 83f., cf. pp. 26f.

33. Ibid, p.111.

34. Ibid, p. 105.

35. Briffault virtually concedes our second argument when he states that the sportive songs of William of Poitiers conform to 'L'ambiance du corps de garde plut t qu'  celle de r unions  l gantes pr sid es par les dames' (op. cit., p. 69). In order to overcome our first argument he resorts to desperate manoeuvres. Thus he contends that Marcabru was only opposed to 'mercenary' attitudes, not to frank sensuality (op. cit., p. 106). He admits that Jaufr  Rudel, the prince of Blaye from 1140 until 1170, was the subject of a 'passion longue port e' but describes his lyric as a 'pan gyrique de l'amour subtilis ', his celebration of 'amour lointain' as a 'c l bre jeu d'esprit', and his ideal of earthly happiness as 'normalement charnel' (op. cit., p. 94; cf. inf., pp.364ff. for a brief examination of Rudel's poetry).

36. R. Briffault, op. cit., pp. 73 - 80.



art of 'courtoisie'.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Briffault himself admits that the poetic 'elevation' of the noble lady confirmed the influential status of those who 'étaient en grande mesure les protectrices et les inspiratrices de cet art'.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, in opposition to Briffault's third argument, we may conclude that the purpose of lyrical sentiments is not to deceive<sup>39</sup> but to express the terms of a personal relationship,<sup>40</sup> and that the influence of romantic literature<sup>41</sup> extends to the

37. Referring to courtly society, Briffault states that 'la passion y était le plus souvent feinte', whereas 'l'intention séductrice ne l'était pas'. Although he recognizes that 'courtoisie' imposed 'le frein d'une discipline règlementée par les conventions', then, Briffault thinks that it was essentially a game (v. op. cit., p. 78). He is forced to take this view because he overlooks the paradoxical character of the medieval personality, which J. Huizinga, who was well aware of the 'play element' in culture (cf. Men And Ideas, op. cit. p. 190; and his last major work Homo Ludens), described so effectively in The Waning Of The Middle Ages, (trans. by F. Hopman), Penguin Books, 1965, esp. pp. 52f., 54-64, 104-109. Medieval man was, therefore, quite capable of alternating between moments of gross sensuality and of deep respect for the sexual relationship.
38. R. Briffault, op. cit., p. 74. For such ladies courtoisie had to be something more than a chimera.
39. This is the implication of Briffault's account of the function of lyric poetry in courtly society.
40. Thus the possibility of hypocrisy arises. In other words, deception depends upon credibility.
41. Briffault denies that the troubadours announced a theme which was to modify Western man's conception of love (v. op. cit., pp. 87 - 111). However, he admits that they developed 'une traînée de traditions qui devaient se perpétuer dans les littératures de l'Europe' (pp. 141 and ff.), and argues that the pressures which the church brought to bear on the heretical (Albigensian) south of France helped to ensure the continuing influence of 'l'art des troubadours' by forcing the poets to 'moralize' their originally sensual notions: (pp. 113 - 140).

spiritual and moral life of the audience.<sup>42</sup>

In view of the dangers which attend Briffault's account of the origins of the courtly lyric, we should expect to find that the search for other sources has continued. Of particular interest is Reto Bezzola's attempt to show that the reaction which the work of Robert d'Arbrissel evoked from William of Poitiers<sup>43</sup> was the decisive factor in the appearance of the courtly lyric. Our chief quarrel with his thesis is that it is exaggerated. He treats the arguments for Arabic influence with a scepticism which they do not deserve<sup>44</sup> and he considers that William's later songs contain all the essentials of the

42. The doctrine that love is the source of all virtue had been stated by Andrew the Chaplain and represented in actu by Chrétien de Troyes long before the middle of the thirteenth century when Montanhagol wrote of love -

E met om'en via  
De ben far tot dia;  
E d'amor mon castitatz,  
Quar qui'n amor ben s'enten  
No pot far que pueis mal renh.

(It sets man on the path of continual well-doing; and from love proceeds chastity, for he who sets his mind on love cannot but avoid evil)

(Ar ab lo coinde pascor, str. 2, vv. 16-20) Of course, Andrew and Chrétien lived in the more orthodox north of France but their view of love was derived from the troubadours even though it supported virtues which were more chivalric than those of the 'courteous' south.

43. v. sup. pp. 329ff. and note 9.

44. However, he indirectly acknowledges the strength of the arguments for Arabic influence by taking every opportunity to reiterate his doubts. v. e.g., op. cit., Deuxième Partie, pp. 183 ff., 246 ff., 300, and note 1 on p. 309.

courtly lyric.<sup>45</sup> The verses which we have already quoted certainly prove that William conceived 'Le désir d'opposer (le) mysticisme ascétique de l'époque', but we cannot agree that they anticipate 'un mysticisme mondain, une élévation spirituelle de l'amour du chevalier'.<sup>46</sup> They include a request for the mutual joy of love which indicated that William's submission to his beloved was gallant rather than permanent, and this implies that the role of later troubadours was not just to refine the courtly theme. As René Nelli points out, the definitive form of 'l'érotique des troubadours' did not appear until the second half of the twelfth century.<sup>47</sup> By assigning such a creative role to William of Poitiers, however, Bezzola can at least do justice to the various types of composition which contributed

45. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Deuxième Partie, pp. 292 - 315,; cf. p. 321, where he states that the aim of the next generation of courtly poets, such as Cercamon (who composed between 1135 and 1145) and Marcabru, was to deepen and to purify the original theme.

46. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Deuxième Partie, p. 296.

47. R. Nelli, op. cit., pp. 159ff; cf. R. Nelli et R. Lavaud, op. cit., p. 21, where it is suggested that the work of Bernard de Ventadour marks the beginning of a period when 'la doctrine de l'Amour, définitivement constituée et fixée, présente désormais une certaine homogénéité'. (Bernard, the son of servants at the castle of Ventadour, learned the art of verse from his lord, Ebles II. When Ebles III realized that his wife, Marguerite de Turenne, was enamoured of the young poet, the latter was dismissed. Among Bernard's later patrons were Eleanor of Aquitaine, the wife of Henry II of England, Ermengarde, the viscountess of Narbonne, and Raimon V, the count of Toulouse. When Raimon died in 1194 Bernard joined the Cistercian monks at Dalen and remained there until his death).

to the formation of the new and noble song. Among the sources which he mentions are a current form of hymn, the poems which northern clerics addressed to aristocratic ladies, and the writings of Ovid.<sup>48</sup> He also admits that Arabic poets may have influenced the troubadours.<sup>49</sup> Above all, his account of Robert d'Arbrissel's activities illustrates the force of mystical and Platonic ideas and thus suggests that the philosophical knowledge of the troubadours was greater than Briffault could allow.

Although Bezzola over-estimates the importance of William of Poitiers, he recognizes that the courtly theme was the product of factors whose variety and depth indicate that 'il répondait à un besoin de l'âme européenne moderne'.<sup>50</sup> Some aspects of this were revealed in our discussion of the patronage which the nobility gave to the troubadours. Bezzola thinks that the fundamental reason for the success of the troubadours was their ability to satisfy a desire for spiritual values which did not reflect the authority of an institutional church. Even if the courtly lyric supplied needs which were less

48. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Deuxième Partie, pp. 299 f., 312f.. The hymnic model appeared in the liturgy of the church of St. Martial in Limoges. Bezzola adds that William's knowledge of Latin poetry was not confined to Ovid.

49. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Deuxième Partie, p. 300.

50. Ibid., p. 314.

exalted than the one which Beszola discerns, its intrinsic and continuing significance is beyond doubt. Hence it is surprising to find that many theologians, whose work might have benefitted from an appraisal of romantic literature, have avoided the subject. Aversion to amorous feelings<sup>51</sup> or to the complexities of literary research<sup>52</sup> cannot justify such neglect of a theme which has become part of the literary heritage of Western man.

The anonymity which was to overtake most of the troubadours has been due, not only to the great number of courtly poets,<sup>53</sup>

51. Thus one contemporary theologian points to the similarity which post-Freudian psychology has discerned between eros and 'infantile love' and makes this an excuse for a very shallow treatment of the romantic sentiment (v. W.G. Cole, Sex In Christianity And Psychoanalysis, A. Galaxy Book, O.U.P., New York, 1966, pp. 242., 311-315).
52. This seems to be the explanation of Martin d'Arey's peculiar treatment of the romantic ethos. Instead of discussing its literary history he analyses the theory of Denis de Rougemont (v. M.C. D'Arey, The Mind And Heart Of Love, Faber & Faber, London, 1945, pp. 272f.). Anders Nygren studies the two forms of love, agape and eros, without considering romantic literature (v. A. Nygren, Agape and Eros, op. cit.). Hence d'Arey rightly criticizes Nygren for making 'an abstraction of Love' by ignoring its human expressions (v. M.C. d'Arey, op. cit., pp. 712f.). Finally, V.A. Demant, who is at least prepared to offer a brief analysis of romantic love, is grateful because the scope of his work enables him to avoid the complex problems which a thorough examination of courtly literature must encounter (v. V.A. Demant, An Exposition Of Christian Sex Ethics, Hodder And Stoughton, 1963, ch. 3, esp. pp. 49-52).
53. When the last of the troubadours appeared in the fourteenth century the number of courtly poets from the regions of the langue d'oc had reached approximately four hundred (v. R. Nelli, op. cit., pp. 273f., 347). We have not discovered how many trouvères or Minnesänger there were but neither group will have been as large as its counterpart in the south of France, the cradle of 'courtoisie'.

but also to the uniformity of their theme and of the manner in which they present it. Leo Spitzer has correctly remarked that the troubadours sang of 'l'amour en soi' and that, as medieval scholars constantly glossed the texts in which they were interested, so the troubadours endlessly embellished the theme of love.<sup>54</sup> Since the trouvères and the Minnesinger did likewise, we do not need to explore the idiosyncracies of the greatest exponents of the new poetic form.<sup>55</sup> An examination of the dominant features of the courtly theme, in the course of which we shall note the distinctive contributions of individual poets and the more elaborate treatment of the romancers, will fulfil the requirements of our ethical purposes.

#### B. The Character of Courtly Love.

Courtly love has its foundation in what Nelli described as the 'hyperestimation' (surestimation) of the lady.<sup>56</sup> If, at the time of the 'classical' troubadours, this elevation of

54. L. Spitzer, L'amour lointain de Jaufré Rudol et le sens de la poésie des troubadours, University of North Carolina Studies In The Romance Languages And Literature, Chapel Hill, Number Five, 1944, pp. 312., 36.

55. Hence we are consigning most of the biographical information which we possess to the notes.

56. R. Nelli, op. cit., pp. 88 et al. This is my rendering of his 'surestimation'.

the lady's worth corresponds largely with the difference in social rank between poet and 'mistress', the worth which is ascribed to the latter nevertheless goes far beyond the requirements of social convention. Indeed, it is already foreshadowed in the poem of the noble count of Poitiers at which we have already had occasion to look -

Qu'ans mi rent a lieys e-m liure,

Qu'en sa carta-m pot escriure,

E no m'en tengatz per yure,

S'ieu ma bona dompna am,

Quar senes lieys non puesc viure,

Tant ai pres de s'amor gran fam.<sup>57</sup>

(I have handed myself over to her, delivered myself up; truly, she can inscribe my name in her charter; do not consider me to be intoxicated if I love my good lady: because without her I cannot live, so great hunger do I have for her love).

The opening verses of this strophe provide the earliest literary evidence for a transfer of ideas from the realm of feudal vassalage to that of sexual relations. William suggests that he is his lady's liege-man and she is his suzerain (dompna). The pattern of feudal relationships, essentially 'masculine' in ethos, provided, not the source, but a vivid image of the bond

57. G. de Poitiers, *Farai chansoneta nueva*, str. 2, vv. 7-12.

which courtly love proposed between a man and his lady.<sup>58</sup> In the following strophe William sketches the character of his lady's worth, and its effect upon him.

Que plus etz blanca qu'evori,

Per qu'ieu autra non azori

Si m breu non ai ajutori,

Cum ma bona dompna m'am,

Morrai, pel cap sanh Gregori,

Si no-m bayz'en cambr'o sutz ram.<sup>59</sup>

(You are whiter than ivory, I adore only you. If I receive no aid nor proof of my lady's love for me, I will die - by the head of St. Gregory - if she does not kiss me in her room or under the bough).

We find the same 'sensual' basis for the estimation of the lady, together with a heightened sense of the suffering love brings, in the poems of Bernard de Ventadour, considered by many

58. In another poem William addresses his lady by means of a senhal (signal), a device which preserves her anonymity. Since the senhal appears in the masculine gender, R. Nelli, op. cit., pp. 97f., considers that it must also serve an honorific purpose. In other words, the poet dignifies his lady by pretending that he is humbling himself before a feudal lord. Nelli doubts whether a poet who had imbibed the anti-feminism of medieval Christendom would have intended this means of praising a lady, and he concludes that the device must have been borrowed from the poetry of Islamic Spain. Although this argument illuminates the function of the senhal, it exaggerates William's desire (and, by implication, the desire of later troubadours) to conceal an unprecedented submission to a lady. If the courtly poets would not have invented the senhal, with its overtones of vassalage, why would they have adopted it? Hence the strongest argument for its adoption is that Arabic poets were already using it.

59. G. de Poitiers, *Farai chansoneta nueva*, str. 3, vv. 13-18.



critics to be the finest poet of the new 'school'.<sup>60</sup> In one of his poems, after spending five strophes depicting the woe that his lady's coolness has brought upon him,

C'ane no nasquet cel de maire

Que tan servís en perdo;<sup>61</sup>

(for never did a man born of woman serve so long in vain), he suddenly cries

Pero ben es qu'ela - m vensa

A tota sa voluntat,

Que, s'el'a tort o bistensa,

Ades n'aura pietat;

Que so mostra l'escriptura:

Causa de bon' aventura

Val us sols jorns mais de cen.<sup>62</sup>

(But it is good that she subjects me utterly to her will for, if she is wrong to repulse me, soon she will show pity; for, as Scripture proves, in matters of good fortune, one single day is worth more than a hundred).

If we ask what could justify such 'hyper-estimation' Bernard supplies the answer two strophes later.

60. e.g. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Troisième Partie, p. 261; cf. R. Nelli and R. Lavaud, op. cit., p. 61.

61. Bernard de Ventadour, Lotens vai e ven e vire, str. 3, vv. 17 f..

62. Ibid, str. 6, vv. 36 - 42.

Ai, bon'amors encobida,  
 Cors be faihz, delgatz e plas,  
 Frescha chara colorida,  
 Cui Deus formet ab sas mas!  
 Totz tems vos ai dezirada,  
 Que res altra no m'agrada.  
 Autr'amor no volh nien!<sup>63</sup>

(Ah! good and coveted love, well fashioned body, slender and smooth, fresh, tinted complexion, that God formed with his hands! So long have I desired you that no other being can satisfy me. I want nothing of any other love!)

As the opening verses of this strophe demonstrate, love is identified with (personified in) the lady, a conception which the feminine gender of amor facilitated.<sup>64</sup> We must therefore modify Denomy's emphatic view that, according to the courtly 'system', woman is the object of desire and thus a mere means to the ennoblement of man.<sup>65</sup> Rather, her nobility requires her 'real presence', in the mind (or heart) of the lover at least, through which she becomes a personal source of human value. Hence we should give the fullest significance to Bernard's acceptance of his lady's superiority even though she may appear to abuse it,

63. Ibid, str. 8, vv. 50 - 56.

64. Although the French 'amour' is masculine, the Provençal 'amor' is feminine.

65. A.J. Denomy, op. cit., pp. 20 - 25, 30 f..

and to his declaration that this is the only love he wants.  
For love - and so the 'superior' lady - is the source of all  
worth. As he says in another song,

Ben es mortz qui d'amor non sen  
Al cor qualche deussa sabor;  
E que val viure ses valor  
Mas per enueg far a lar gen?<sup>66</sup>

(He truly is dead who does not feel some sweet savour of love  
in his heart; for what is the use of living without virtue  
except to make men weary?)

The worth of love (and, therefore, the lady) is not  
conceived in purely physical or sensual terms. Having sung  
of her bodily endowments in the previous lyric Bernard  
concludes -

Dousa res ben ensonhada,  
Cel que-us a tan gen formada,  
Mo'n do cel joi qu'en aten!<sup>67</sup>

(Sweet, refined (i.e. courteous) creature, may he who  
so finely formed you grant me the joy I await!)

Such praise may appear to be of little significance. But,  
for the advocates of courtly love, a lady who demonstrates that she  
is well-versed in the art of 'courtoisie' gives final proof of the

66. Bernard de Ventadour, Non es maravilha s'ieu chan, str.  
2, vv. 9 - 12.

67. Bernard de Ventadour, Lo tens vai e ven o viro, str. 9,  
vv. 57 - 59.

nobility which is already hers by birth, i.e. by social rank, wealth, and beauty. Ernst Curtius believes that such a broad conception of nobility betokens a period or milieu of enlightenment.<sup>68</sup>

This combination of natural and acquired endowments, which make the lady who possesses them the source of all that is valuable in life, leads us to investigate, at the risk of appearing pedantic, the function of the concept of God in the courtly scheme. While it seems likely that Bernard himself had a clear appreciation of the Christian notion of transcendence - frustrated in love and courtly life he was finally to join the Cistercian monks in the abbey at Balon - this is not operative in the above verses, nor in the courtly view generally. What is presupposed, or at least implied, therein, is a continuity between the divine and the human realms such that the latter can embody, in a particular form, all the worth of the former. Transcendence is not necessarily denied to deity but such as there is does not entail any opposition to mundane principles of life, any via negativa. On the contrary, the poet can exclaim that his lady is the ultimate principle of human value. Some critics have here discerned the influence of the Platonic naturalism which emanated from the cathedral school of Chartres.

68. E.R. Curtius, European Literature And The Latin Middle Ages, (trans. by W.R. Trask), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953, p. 179.

Although few troubadours will have been familiar with the teachings of this school, the similarity of outlook cannot be denied and a direct influence on poets at the northern courts is more likely. As Curtius points out, many of the unbeneficed clerks of the twelfth-century (when the revival of learning produced a surplus of 'intellectuals') found their way to feudal courts where they taught and entertained.<sup>69</sup> Certainly, when Chrétien de Troyes depicts the noble features of his heroes and heroines he ascribed their creation equally to God and to Nature.<sup>70</sup> Heer suggests that there is an echo of Chartres' Natura in Marie de France's conception of Love as the ruling force or presiding goddess of nature.<sup>71</sup> However, such speculation often ignores the fact that, since Boethius, this conception had become common property of the West. Chaucer, who elaborates it in Troilus and Criseyde and elsewhere, appears to have derived it direct from Boethius.<sup>72</sup>

There is, then, no need to rehearse medieval man's sense of

69. Ibid, p. 384.

70. e.g. *Erec And Enide*, vv. 411 ff., p. 6; *Cligés*, vv. 575-872, pp. 101 f; vv. 2707 - 2792, pp. 126 f..

71. F. Heer, op. cit., p. 142.

72. *Troilus And Crescide*, III, 8 ff., 1744 ff., in F.N. Robinson (ed.), The Works Of Geoffrey Chaucer, Second Edition, O.U.P., 1957.

familiarity with the sacred in order to explain the wealth of religious imagery 'transferred' to the secular plane in the poetry and romances of courtly love.<sup>73</sup> This courtly rhetoric plays an important part in the work of the German Minnesinger, Heinrich von Morungen.<sup>74</sup> In one poem, having begun by telling us that

He is a wise man, who with sure election  
Serves where the worth of his service can be savoured,  
And turns to one by whom his suit is favoured,

he continues in the next strophe -

I have great need of favour, could I find it,  
For the woman of my choosing is throned above the sun,  
My pain incurable, so she be not minded  
To look on me again, as she of old has done,

and in the next, and final, strophe -

73. L. Spitzer recognizes this and rather apologetically points out that 'sacralising' the profane is less serious than profaning the sacred (op. cit., pp. 1f., 6). However, in order to justify his thesis concerning the 'Augustinian' basis of the courtly ideal, he too easily assumes that medieval man's religious frame of reference was specifically 'Augustinian' and that the 'transfer' of religious imagery implied conscious appropriation of the underlying ideas. However, his thesis does show that the courtly ethos shared an affinity with the cultural background which too many scholars overlook.

74. A native of northern Thuringia whose date of birth is not known. He spent some years in the service of Dietrich of Meissen, who was also a patron of Walther von der Vogelweide (v. inf. p. 362, note 103), and may have died in 1222.

Whither is it vanished, my bright star of morning?

Alas, what could I hope for since my glorious sun uprose?

She is too far above me, too regal in her scorning,

And long hours must pass before the sunset close.<sup>75</sup>

With the question whether the courtly ideal places the lady 'too far above' her lover for any real, personal contact to be possible we shall have to deal later.<sup>76</sup> Heinrich's verses also reveal, however, one final aspect of the 'hyperestimation' of the lady and of love which we should note. This is the paradoxical mixture of necessity and freedom in the love of which the poets and romancers speak. In some cases the paradox is resolved chronologically - so Heinrich emphasizes that his 'bondage' is the result of his own free decision or 'foolish dream'. This form of resolution also appears in romances where the lover decides to love before having either met or seen his beloved. Such is the origin of William's love for Flamenca in the romance which bears her name,<sup>77</sup> and it also seems to have applied in Chrétien's source for Lancelot, i.e. in 'the matter' which the Countess Marie of Champagne supplied

75. Heinrich von Morungen (22), *Ez tuot vil we, swer herzecliche minnet*, str. 1, vv. 5 - 7, str. 2, vv. 8-11, str. 3, vv. 15-18.

76. cf. inf. pp. 398ff..

77. M.E. Porter and M.J. Hubert (trans. and ed.), *The Romance Of Flamenca*, Princeton, 1962. v. esp. vv. 1762 ff.. The Romance was written in the thirteenth century by an anonymous author from the lands of the langue d'oc.

to him for his romance.<sup>78</sup> Chrétien does not appear to have approved such a wilful blindness in love for he is anxious to tell us that Lancelot knew Gawain, which implies that he also knew Guinevere, even though their first reported conversation betrays no such recognition,<sup>79</sup> and he also seizes an early opportunity for Lancelot to see the Queen and fall into one of his periodic states of 'religious' rapture.<sup>80</sup> Chrétien is not alone in the view that love is a state in which freedom and necessity co-exist. In the first part of the Romance of the Rose Guillaume de Lorris, who here reaps the 'last harvest' of 'the spirit of amour courtois'<sup>81</sup> depicts the dreamer entering freely into the Garden of Mirth but he only becomes Love's 'vassal' after the God of Love causes five arrows to be shot into his heart. Yet this only happens after the God

'saw that I had fixed my choice

Upon the bud that pleased me most of all'.<sup>82</sup>

If freedom of choice seems still to have the upper hand here, that is only because the poet has neatly dissociated it from the full depth of loving and made it a preliminary to true love.

78. Lancelot, vv. 1 - 30; p. 270.

79. Ibid, vv. 247 ff., pp. 273 f..

80. Ibid, vv. 539 ff., p. 277.

81. E.R. Curtius, op. cit., p. 125.

82. The Romance Of The Rose, op. cit., pp. 12 ff., section 3, vv. 1 ff; pp. 33ff., section 7, passim; and section 8, vv. 1-182.



Furthermore, we not only find romances in which vision of the lady 'necessitates' the hero's love and so moves the plot forward (Chaucer's Knights Tale is an excellent example of this<sup>83</sup>), but the author of Flamenca and de Lorris do not disagree with the 'doctrine' that 'Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex'.<sup>84</sup> The sense of 'predestination' in love is implicit in the following verses of Bernard de Ventadour -

Pois fom andui efan,  
 L'am ades e la blan,<sup>85</sup>

(Since we were children together, I have loved and courted her).

To this 'philosophical' aspect of courtly love we shall have occasion to return.<sup>86</sup>

83. e.g. vv. 1096 f., in F.N. Robinson (ed.) op. cit.,
84. Andreas Capellanus, The Art Of Courtly Love, op. cit., Book I, ch. 1, p. 28, cf. The Romance of the Rose, op. cit. and p. 50, section 10, vv. 48 ff.; The Romance Of Flamenca vv. 5309 ff., 6608 f.
85. Bernard de Ventadour, Lo gous tens de pascor, str. 4, vv. 25 f.. Some critics refer to statements such as this in order to support a Freudian interpretation of courtly verse, viz., that it is the poeticizing of the page-boy's puberty dreams. The oft-expressed desire to see the lady naked would be similarly interpreted. (v. e.g., H. Hatzfeld, review of A.J. Denomy, op. cit., in Symposium, no. 2, November, 1948). This form of 'reductionism', like all others, completely ignores the fact that we are here dealing with a highly self-conscious literary product and not a spontaneous psychological effect. However, as Spitzer points out (op. cit., pp. 64 f., note 36a), the theory does draw attention to a theme of the courtly lyric which, together with the dream-motif, was an important means of expressing the identification of love with desire. (Since Spitzer's work is an analysis of the lyrics of Jaufré Rudel, he tends to exaggerate the 'pure spirituality of courtly desire'. cf. inf. pp. 363ff.).
86. cf. inf. p. 412.

The 'doctrine' which we have just quoted is taken from The Art of Courtly Love, a work which Andrew the Chaplain produced at the court of the same Countess for whom Chrétien composed his Lancelot. It is largely by analysis of Andrew's doctrine that Denomy seeks to sustain his thesis concerning the Avicennist source of the courtly system. Although Andrew goes on to say that love involves a 'common desire' on the part of each of the lovers 'to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace' (and it is the significance of love as desire that Denomy wants to emphasize), he also fulfils his pledge to consider 'between what persons love may exist' and thus upsets Denomy's view that the lady is merely the object of love.<sup>87</sup> This love may be blind in some senses of that word but it requires a lady of supreme nobility as its source and goal.

As the source of all that is good in the world love can bring no harm to its 'vassals'. If there is one concept which sums up the blessings which love confers it is joy. We have already seen Bernard awaiting the joy which his lady, by her haughtiness, is withholding from him.<sup>88</sup> Thus his anticipation serves to show, not that joy is merely a future prospect or final reward for the lover, but that it belongs to the essence of love which she, foolishly and wrongly is undermining. Another of

87. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., I, Intro. and ch. I, p. 28; chs. 5 and 6, pp. 32ff. (my italics). According to Denomy (op.cit.) the courtly lady is analogous to the 'Prime Mover' in Avicenna's philosophical system. Hence she is not a person but an adorable object which awakens desire in man.

88. cf. sup. pp. 348-352.

Bernard's songs begins -

Tant ai mo cor ple de joya,  
 Tot me desnatura;  
 Flor blancha, vermelh'e groya  
 Me par la freyura,  
 C'ab lo ven et ab la ploya  
 Me creis l'aventura,  
 Per que mos pretz mont'e poya  
 E mos chans melhura  
 Tan ai al cor c'amor  
 De Joi e de doussor,  
 Per que-l gens me sembra flor  
 E la neus verdura

(My heart is so full of joy that it transforms nature; frost, to me, has the appearance of a white, vermilion and yellow flower; with the wind and rain my happiness increases, and so my worth grows, rises, and my singing improves. I have so much love in my heart, so much joy and sweetness, that ice seems like a flower to me, and snow like verdure).

It was William of Poitiers who, with his own nuance, first sounded the note of joy.<sup>89</sup> But, as the troubadour theme was more fully elaborated, joy tended to be identified with love (and the lady) and William's suggestion of mutual gaiety and pleasure was muted.

89. cf. sup., pp. 330f.

So, when Arnaut de Mareuil<sup>90</sup> celebrates the return of spring,

Non pose mudar, no-m sovena

D'un amor per qu'eu sui jais.

Per natur'e per uzatge

M'ave qu'eu vas joi m'acli.....<sup>91</sup>

(it cannot fail to remind me of a love which makes me gay.

By nature and by training my mind inclines towards joy).

And when Peire Vidal's<sup>92</sup> thoughts turn to Provence he remembers first the joy which shines forth so purely there.<sup>93</sup>

As one commentator has said, the works of Chrétien de Troyes are full of the concept of joy.<sup>94</sup> If it is the proper reward of success in love or chivalrous deeds,<sup>95</sup> it is also something more profound, even mysterious. The element of mystery comes partly

90. Arnaut de Mareuil was one of the many clerks who turned to poetry in order to earn a living. Between 1170 and 1200 he composed for the following patrons: Azalais, the viscountess of Béziers, Alphonse II, king of Aragon, and William VIII of Montpellier.

91. Arnaut de Mareuil, *Bel m'es quan lo vens m'alena*, str. 2, vv. 11-14.

92. A more famous contemporary of Arnaut de Mareuil, Peire Vidal was the son of a furrier in Toulouse. A sign and, perhaps, a cause of his renown was the extent of his travels. Among the places he visited were Hungary, the Holy Land, and Malta.

93. Peire Vidal, *Ab l'alen tir vas me l'aire*, str. 2.

94. L. Spitzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 7f.

95. e.g. Erec and Enide, vv. 2069 ff., p. 27; vv. 5175 - 5366, p. 68; Lancelot, vv. 4651 - 4754, p. 329.

from the Celtic background - we think especially of the third and final part of Eric and Enide where the hero sets out with his beloved to win the 'Joy of the Court'.<sup>96</sup> However, the profundity of Chrétien's concept of joy is also due to its ambiguity. Chrétien appreciates the possibility of attaining joy through suffering for a noble cause and he weaves this apparent paradox into his lovers' monologues, especially in Cligés. Thus Fénice, bemoaning the absence of her beloved Cligés, cries 'God! Why are our bodies not so near one another that I could in some way bring back my heart! Bring back? Foolish one, if I should remove it from its joy I should be the death of it'.<sup>97</sup> The conception of joy as a mixture of ecstasy and suffering is particularly strong in Flamenca, the author of which regards joy and pleasure as the essence of love.<sup>98</sup> In his portion of the Romance of the Rose de Lorris sharply distinguishes Joy from Suffering. The latter '... never knew The joy of being fondled or embraced'.<sup>99</sup> But, as later

96. Eric and Enide, vv. 5367 - 6958, pp. 70 - 90. On the background to this episode see 'Gereint, Owein, And Peredur' by Idris Llewelyn Foster and 'Chrétien De Troyes' by Jean Trappier in R.S. Loomis (ed.), Arthurian Literature In The Middle Ages, O.U.P., 1959, esp. pp. 196; 167.

97. Cligés, vv. 4283 - 4574, p. 149. As this passage implies, Chrétien thought that women were subject to love in much the same way as men. This notion of the emotional (or spiritual) equality of lovers is but one aspect of his attempt to minimize the difference between the courtly and more conventional views of the sexual relationship. cf. inf. pp.393ff..

98. In op. cit., vv. 2369 f., 2803 ff; 2856 ff..

99. In op. cit., p. 9, section 2, vv. 136f..

developments reveal, the dreamer is not spared the necessity of the suffering which love brings. His final words to Fair Welcome reflect the plight in which de Lorris, who failed to complete his allegory, leaves him -

'If I lose your good will, I shall despair,

For elsewhere I can find no source of confidence.'<sup>100</sup>

Before commenting on this aspect of 'Love's joy' let us close this resume of the omni-present motif with a few lines from poems of two famous Minnesänger. Albrecht von Johansdorf<sup>101</sup> concludes one of his pieces with the motif of the lady as the source of joy -

Of her grace and goodness I have need,

And if she will, give joy

She can, and if not, I am poor indeed.<sup>102</sup>

Walther von der Vogelweide,<sup>103</sup> considered by many to be the

100. Ibid, p. 88, section 19, vv. 179 f..

101. We possess no reliable information concerning Albrecht. He probably lived during the latter half of the twelfth century and may have been associated with Bishop Wolfer of Passau, another patron of Walther von der Vogelweide. His poems suggest that he participated in a Crusade, which, if our previous surmises are correct, was probably the one that took place in 1189 and 1190.

102. Albrecht von Johansdorf, *Wie sich minne hebt, daz wiz ich wol*, str. 4, vv. 26-28.

103. Walther was probably born in Austria (c. 1170). He led a wandering life and took a keen interest in political affairs, although his loyalties tended to depend on the identity of his patron. In the service of Philip of Swabia Walther supported the Hohenstaufen cause against the Pope but, when Philip died in 1208, he espoused the rival cause of Otto of Brunswick. Dissatisfied with the treatment that he received from Otto, and, possibly, inclined to relinquish his new allegiance, Walther finally identified himself with Friedrich II. His restless life ended soon after 1227.

the poet of 'distant love' and so of 'endless desire'. For him love is virtually a spiritual force, a purely 'internal event',<sup>108</sup> requiring only the thought of the lady to maintain its transforming effect on the life of the individual. Hence we find a constant dialectic between seeing and not seeing the lady in his poetry.

Iratz e gauzens m'en partray,

S'ieu ja la vey, l'amor de lonh

Mais non sai quoras la veyrai,

Car trop son nostras terras lonh<sup>109</sup>

(Sad and joyful will I leave - if I see her - the distant love; but I do not know when I will see her, for our lands are too distant) And that means that he can also find joy (as well as sadness) when he cannot see her.

Vex ditz qui m'apella lechay

Ni deziron d'amor de lonh,

Car nulhs autres joys tan no-m play

Cum jauzimens d'amor de lonh.<sup>110</sup>

(He speaks truly who calls me avid and desirous of distant love, for no other joy pleases me so much as enjoying distant love).

108. L. Spitzer, op. cit., pp. 2, 27.

109. J. Rudel, Lanquan li jorn son lonc en may, str. 4, vv. 22-25.

110. Ibid, str. 7, vv. 43-46.

If Jaufré can thus rest content with the delectable thought of seeing his lady

Verayamen, en tais aizis<sup>111</sup>

(really, in pleasant surroundings)

this is insufficient for more lusty spirits such as the author of Flamenca. He castigates purely spiritual joy - and we may be sure that he would include Jaufré in his rebuke - for being basically individualistic and a mere shadow of real joy.<sup>112</sup>

The latter consists in a true meeting or mingling, of hearts<sup>113</sup> and, in this romance, provides justification for actual adultery. However, since the courtly 'code' permitted this in a case where the lady's husband showed himself jealous of her lover - such was precisely the attitude of Archambaud, Flamenca's husband - and since the author failed to complete his romance, we cannot be sure that William's return to Flamenca after Archambaud has repented of his 'sin' signals a resumption of the adulterous relationship. Nevertheless, other poets and romancers reveal their sympathy with William's conception of the reward appropriate to courtly service. A major reason for Chrétien's attempts to place 'courtesy' at the service of marriage lies in his conviction that mingling of hearts should be accompanied by, or lead to, mingling of

111. Ibid, str. 6, v. 40.

112. v. op. cit., vv. 2163 ff.; cf. 6007 f, 6087 ff.

113. Ibid, vv. 5193 f..



bodies. So Fénice, betrothed to the deceitful Alis, emperor of the Greeks and uncle of her beloved Cligés, refuses to emulate Yseult's adulterous love for Tristram: 'Such love as hers was far too base; for her body belonged to two, whereas her heart was possessed by one. Thus all her life was spent, refusing her favours to neither one. But mine is fixed on one object, and under no circumstances will there be any sharing of my body and heart. Never will my body be portioned out between two shareholders. Who has the heart has the body, too, and may bid all others stand aside'.<sup>114</sup> The romancers are not alone in the opinion that love must find expression in mutual physical possession or that joy is something more than the anticipatory delight of service to the lady. We have already looked at the poem in which Bernard de Ventadour points out the folly of 'serving without reward', although the irony of the song is that this is precisely the situation which the poet suffers.<sup>115</sup> In another attack on pointless service Bernard threatens, not merely to cease the art of courtesy, but to go into exile,<sup>116</sup> which, as we have seen, is what he virtually did

114. Cligés, vv. 3063 - 3216, p. 132.

115. v. sup. pp. 348-352.

116. Bernard de Ventadour, Can vei la lauzeta mover, str. 7. This poem is known to have inspired one of Chrétien de Troyes' lyrics. Bernard had a considerable influence on Chrétien. cf. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Troisième Partie, p. 375, note 2.

in the end. What is finally in question is whether the poet, finding at least the prospect of joy in service of his lady, can maintain hope and confidence. In his 'song of joy' Bernard cries

De s'amistat me reciza!

Mas be n'ai fiança,

Que sivals en n'ai conquiza

La bela semblansa

(From friendship she casts me aside! But I have confidence because I have at least gained her sweet regard).

In spite of their separation - he seems to be singing of Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife now of Henry II of England - he tells us -

Mo cor ai pres d'Amor

(my heart is near to Love)

and so

Eu n'ai la bon'esperansa

(I retain good hope)

even though

Plus trac pena d'amor

De Tristan l'amador

Que n sofri manhta dolor

Per Izeut la blonda.<sup>117</sup>

(I get more pain from love than the amorous Tristan who suffered much grief for Yseult the blonde).

117. Bernard de Ventadour, Tant ai mo cor ple de joya, str. 3, vv. 25-28, 33; str. 4, vv. 37, 45-48.

If Bernard can glean satisfaction from so small a blessing,  
we should beware of exaggerating the 'purely sensual' significance  
of the following,

Las! e viure que-m val

S'eu no vei a jornal

Mo fi joi natural:

En leih, sutz fenestral,

Cors blanc tot atretal

Com la neus a nadal,

Si c'amdui cominal

Mezuressem egal!<sup>118</sup>

(Alas! what use is life to me if I cannot daily see my one  
true joy: in bed, beneath the window, a body white as the snow  
of Christmas-tide, so that we may lie together and measure our  
equality!)

Clearly, however, Bernard is no Jaufré Rudel.

118. Lo gens tems de pascor, str. 5, vv. 33-40. Several critics have contended that the last verse implies more sexual freedom than courtly society was prepared to allow and have therefore challenged the authenticity of the text (which we have obtained from S.G. Nichols Jr. and J.A. Galm et al, eds., The Songs of Bernart de Ventadorn, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1962). One of the amendments which have been proposed is accepted by Nelli and Lavaud (v. op. cit., p. 78). They render the concluding verses as follows -

Si c'amdui cominal

Mezurem s'em egal.

(So that together we can measure whether we are equal).

This reading may appear to substitute 'a silly action for one which is perfectly understandable' (S.G. Nichols Jr. and J.A. Galm et al., op. cit., p. 183) but we cannot presume to be the arbiters of courtly taste. If this demanded the exclusion of sexual intercourse, however, the erotic implications of the text are not as great as some have supposed and emendation is unnecessary.

Before we complete this account of the motif of joy we should notice that it invariably has, as its companion, youth. In the courtly lyric the concept of youth appears infrequently but some verses of Rigaut de Barbezieux<sup>119</sup> show that it is not out of place -

Vielha de sen e de laus,

Joves on jois lía,

Vielha de pretz e d'onrar,

Joves de bel domnejar,

Lonh de folia;

Vielh'en toty fagz leiaus,

Jov'on Jovenz es saus,

Mielhs de Donna, vielh'en tot bel joven

Avinen

Vielha ses velhezir

E joves d'ans e de bel aculhir.<sup>120</sup>

(Old in intelligence and glory, young - where joy dwells, old in worth and honour, young in sweet courtesy, far removed from folly; old in all matters of royalty, young - where youth is safe, surpassing lady, old in sweet youthfulness, arresting, old though not growing old and young in years as well as sweet welcoming!)

In the Romance of the Rose de Lorrís tells us that Mirth, the owner of the garden, is 'a youthful gentleman'.<sup>121</sup> Of Youth, one

119. Rigaut composed his lyrics during the first half of the thirteenth century. He was a petty nobleman of Saintonge.

120. Rigaut de Barbezieux, *A tressi com Persevaus*, str. 6, vv. 56-66.

121. v. op. cit., p. 18, section 4, v. 32.

of Mirth's companions, he says that 'gaiety and joy were all her care' and, later, when Venus extols the graces of the lover to Fair Welcome, she adds 'And, what is better, he is young, not old'.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, even this actual youth must learn through suffering in love. And, though romancers such as Chrétien depict youthful heroes and heroines,<sup>123</sup> their tales make even clearer that it is necessary for the young to be trained in the art of love and to acquire the wisdom of age.

For, as Andrew the Chaplain pontificates, those of tender age have 'no constancy' and are 'changeable' in every way.<sup>124</sup>

Hence it is not surprising to find youthful impetuosity and irresponsibility severely condemned in courtly romances.<sup>125</sup>

For the courtly ideal is to unite in one person the merits of youth and age.<sup>126</sup>

Curtius points out that personified unity of youth and age in either sex constitutes a rhetorical theme (topos) and corresponds with a Jungian archetype. The presence of 'the rejuvenation motif', he tells us, is a sign of an early or 'high' period of culture.<sup>127</sup>

Certainly this motif is present

122. Ibid, p. 26, section 4, vv. 353 f.; p. 75, section 17, vv. 58 ff.

123. Again we may note Chrétien's tendency to apply courtly requirements similarly to both sexes. cf. sup. pp. 360f., and note 97.

124. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., I, 5, pp. 32 f..

125. v. e.g. The Romance of Flourence, op. cit., vv. 248, 749 f., 1768 f..

126. The emphasis which Gottfried von Strassburg places on the complementary nature of the relationship between the youthful Tristan and his mature foster-father, Rual li Foitenant (v. op. cit., pp. 102 f.) may be a criticism, rather than a variation of this theme (cf. sup. p. 335, note 21 on the non-courtly aspects of Gottfried's romance).

127. E.E. Curtius, op. cit., pp. 98 ff.

in the verses of Rigaut but there is sufficient evidence of opposition between the generations in courtly literature for us to point out the tempestuous social background of which, Curtius also informs us, such opposition is a sure sign. The courtly ideal, however, was to transcend this division by attaining 'Joi e Jovenz'.<sup>128</sup>

Although troubadours and Minnesänger such as Bernard de Ventadour and Albrecht von Johansdorf lament their failure to derive joy from 'courtoisie', their very complaint is a means of continuing their service to their lady. We should therefore beware of reading too much of Bernard's life - his willingness to quit one affair for the sake of a new one and his final renunciation of the courtly milieu - into the content of his lyrics. If these show him to be more impatient of reward than some poets, they also demonstrate his awareness of what

Cercamons ditz: greu er cortes

Hom qui d'amor se desesper.<sup>129</sup>

(Cercamon says: that man is hardly courteous who despairs of love).

The man who shows himself too impatient of his lady's fair welcome, kisses, or embraces is a false lover because he ignores another basic element of the courtly code 'foreshadowed' by William of Poitiers, namely, that the lover must submit to a 'test' or

128. cf. R. Briffault, op. cit., p. 164.

129. Cercamon, Quant l'aura doussa s'amarzis, str. 11, vv. 57 f..

'proof' of love.

Ma dona m'assai'e-m prueva,

Quossi de qual guiza l'am;<sup>130</sup>

(My lady tests me and sets out to prove what kind of love I have for her)

Again, like the concept of 'Jovenz', the concept of 'asag' (test) is not explicitly mentioned in many of the lyrics or romances of courtly love. However, the notion is always operative, in the situation evoked by the poet or out of which the plot of the romance develops.

In lyric poetry the obstacle which prevents love from degenerating into a headlong rush of sensuality is invariably its adulterous character. This, above all, accounts for the need to maintain secrecy in love.

Be for'oimais sazos,

Bela donna e pros,

Que-m fos datz a rescos

En baizen guizardos<sup>131</sup>

(The time is surely ripe, beautiful and worthy lady, for giving me a secret kiss as reward)

These verses are quoted from one of Bernard of Ventadour's poems in which another obstacle to love is implied, namely, the difference in social rank between lover and mistress. Hence her haughtiness which,

130. Guilhem de Poitiers, op. cit., str. 1, vv 3 f..

131. Bernard de Ventadour, Lo gens tems de pascor, str. 7, vv. 49-52.

says Bernard, amounts to inner treason in one whose appearance is 'frances e bos',<sup>132</sup> (hoble and good). The use of the senhal (signal) or pseudonym preserves the anonymity of the lady though, when it is pointed out that 'Bel Vezzer' (Beau Voir), which Bernard uses in this poem,<sup>133</sup> is the surname of Marguerite de Turenne, we begin to doubt whether the senhal was always intended to be effective. With some notable exceptions, such as Henrich von Morungen, the German Minnesinger, who were more under the influence of the Church and less under that of noble ladies than their Provençal predecessors, were less satisfied with adulterous love for an unattainable lady. If their poetry celebrates such love it is usually branded as folly as we have seen in the case of Walther von der Vogelweide.<sup>134</sup>

The oft-debated role of the lauzengiers or slanderers<sup>135</sup> would appear to be relevant to the need for secrecy in love. By spreading rumours about an affair they can threaten its continued existence, not only by promoting the lover's expulsion from court,

132. Ibid, str. 8, v. 62.

133. Ibid, str. 9, v. 65.

134. cf. sup. pp. 364ff.

135. cf. R. Briffault, op. cit., pp. 77 f., 107 f.; R. Nelli, op. cit., pp. 189 f..



but, to follow up a possible interpretation of Flamenca, by facilitating its carnal expression which, especially if the husband should repent of his jealousy, will destroy love's future. However, in whatever way they may threaten true love ('fin amors'), their presence serves as an obstacle which, if secrecy is maintained, will promote true love as much as the presence of the lady's husband.

While Jaufré Rudel conceives of love in adulterous terms, it is clear that the chief obstacle for him is the distance separating him from his beloved's physical presence. If this suggests that he agreed with his near-contemporary Marcabru that the adultery-motif pandered to aristocratic sensuality, it also indicates that what is finally important in the courtly conception is the efficiency, and not the specific character, of the obstacle to love. Its adulterous or class character may suffice for those of moral probity or of humble birth, but the noble prince and lord must be separated from his mistress. Certainly, when the northern romancers transfer the courtly theme from the lyric to the narrative plane the capacity for variation in love's obstacles is vastly increased. In Chrétien's Lancelot the obstacle is separation, the result of Guinevere's abduction by Meleagant. In Yvain, as in Marie de France's Gugemar, the obstacle is more psychological -- the youthful impetuosity of the hero. In Marie's Sir Launfal the obstacle appears to be the

spiritualism which Rudel was the first to advocate, that is, which debars the real presence of the beloved. In Flamenca, and many other romances, the obstacle is the husband's jealousy. Hence it is surprising to find Andrew the Chaplain, a resident of the same northern court as Chrétien, emphasizing the adulterous character of the obstacle necessary for true love. He reports the decision which Marie, the Countess of Champagne, gave at a 'court of love', namely, that love can find no place in marriage, one of the reasons being 'that a precept of love tells us that no woman, even if she is married, can be crowned with the reward of the King of Love unless she is seen to be enlisted in the service of Love himself outside the bonds of wedlock'.<sup>136</sup> This argument is repeated in more than one of the conversations between persons of different social status which Andrew offers as illustrations of 'the art of courtly love'.<sup>137</sup> Hence he places great stress on the necessity of secrecy in love.<sup>138</sup> Andrew's work reflects the northern climate in its tendency to accept that courtly love will actually proceed to adultery<sup>139</sup> and

136. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit. I, 6, pp. 106 f..

137. cf. Ibid, pp. 100 ff, 116 f..

138. e.g. Ibid, pp. 81 f. (rules VI & X); II, 8 p. 185 (rule XIII). Andrew gives two sets of rules of love - one of twelve, the other of thirty one. Each set is preceded by a brief romance. Rule I in the second set is 'Marriage is no real excuse for not loving'.

139. cf. sup. pp. 364ff..

it may be that this unbeneficed clerk also wished to emphasize the anti-Christian character of this love. The emphasis which he places on love's adulterous character, together with his almost total silence on the subject of 'love's joy', appears to lend further support to Robertson's thesis that the whole of his treatise, and not just the final retraction and a few disclaimers to 'Walter',<sup>140</sup> constitutes a condemnation of the courtly view.<sup>141</sup> His subtlety may surpass that of his master, Ovid.<sup>142</sup>

The notion of the lady's right, indeed duty, to test the sincerity of those who laid claim to her love not only guaranteed that potential lovers received training in the noble art but provided the lady with a means of discovering whether her suitor's sentiments were genuine. Of course, most of the poets were seeking her patronage, rather than her amorous favours, and the number of aspirants meant that there was keen competition. This helps to explain the so-called 'individualism'

140. The friend, never satisfactorily identified, for whose benefit Andrew depicts the 'art' of love.

141. v. D.W. Robertson, Jr., in op. cit

142. Andrew's knowledge of Ovid has not only influenced the structure of his work - with its retraction in the final book which may be as deceptive as the one found in his model (Ovid apologizes, not to the reader, but to Cupid, v. The Remedies Of Love, vv. 1 ff.) but also much of its content. Thus Andrew follows Ovid's account of the manner in which a lover should behave in the presence of his lady and of the effect which love has on his appetite and sleep, and he agrees with the Latin poet that sight is the means of arousing man's love and that each partner must derive full satisfaction from the acts of love.

of the troubadours, one sign of which is the frequent complaint that love's false pretenders manage to endear themselves to the ladies. Bernard laments:

Ai Dieus! car si fosson trian  
 D'entre-ls fals li fin amador  
 E-l lauzengier e-l trichador  
 Portesson corns el fron denan!  
 Tot l'aur del mon e tot l'argen  
 Mi volgr'aver dat, s'ieu l'agues,  
 Sol que ma dona conoques  
 Aissi cum ieu l'am finamen.<sup>143</sup>

(Ah God! that they may distinguish between true and false lovers let the slanderer and deceiver wear horns on their forehead! I would willingly give all the gold and silver in the world - if I had it - that my lady might know how truly I love her).

Of course, if the ladies knew how to make this distinction, the poet would gain a greater share in the world's wealth and his economic insecurity, which is the source of his bitterness, would be overcome. However, let us now observe some of the features of a true lover which the tests of love were supposed to reveal.

In our analysis of other central motifs of courtly love we have noted the fundamental role that the lady was expected to play.

143. Bernard de Ventadour, Non es meravelha s'ieu chan, str. 5, vv. 33-40.

In general terms this amounts to maintaining her nobility, which implies that she will neither too readily accept nor totally discourage her courtier's advances. Even if the social status of the courtier is equal or superior to her own, she must cultivate an initial coolness. Her proper attitude is illustrated in 'courtly conversations' which occupy approximately two-thirds of Andrew the Chaplain's treatise on the art of courtly love.<sup>144</sup> We have already mentioned that Andrew's teaching betrays the influence of his northern environment. An example of this influence is the emphasis which he places on the equality of lovers (which corresponds to his permission of actual adultery). The troubadours tended to think that love could not enable a courtier and his mistress to ignore a difference in social rank but, as Bezzola points out, Andrew's concept of equality destroys the erotic significance of class distinction.<sup>145</sup> Although Andrew states that 'Character alone...is worthy of the crown of love',<sup>146</sup> however, even he cannot ignore a person's social background altogether. He decides that lovers must belong to the middle class

144. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., I, 6, pp. 33-141.

145. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Troisième Partie, pp. 326, 377, 385.

146. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., I, 6, p. 35.

(plebeia) at least.<sup>147</sup> (This relative disregard for class distinction undoubtedly reflects the greater security of the northern aristocracy whose ranks were more 'closed' than those of their southern counterparts).<sup>148</sup>

We have also had occasion to note some essential aspects of the courtier's role. He must be humble, patient and to him especially falls the duty of guarding the secrecy of a love-affair. A distinctive feature of the 'southern' conception of 'courtoisie' is its evaluation of poetic ability. The poet composed his lyric 'in order to extol and magnify his lady's worth',<sup>149</sup> and, since she was the source of his inspiration, his verses were a means of proving his affection. Hence

147. Ibid, I, 11; p. 149.

148. cf. Herbert Moller, The Social Causation of The Courtly Love Complex, in Comparative Studies In Society And History, vol. I, 1958/9, Mouton & Co., The Hague, pp. 137-163. After arguing strongly for a sociological explanation of the courtly system - the opportunists who were seeking admission to the 'open' aristocracy of southwestern Europe had little prospect of a suitable marriage because there were insufficient noblewomen - Moller concludes with the surprisingly reticent judgment that we would have to investigate the ideological and cultural background in order to discover why these conditions produced this particular form of literature. In other words, 'the courtly love complex' is not merely a product of sociological factors.

149. Guilhem de Cabestanh, Lo jorn qu'ie - us vis, dompna primeiramen, str. 2, v. 13. Little is known of Guilhem. His life possibly spans the close of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries. However, legend has helped to preserve his fame by identifying him as the lover whose heart had to be eaten by his mistress in order to appease her jealous husband.

the justly famous self-introduction of Arnaut Daniel<sup>150</sup> -

Ieu sui Arnautz qu'amas l'aura

E chatz la lebr'ab lo bou

E nadi contra suberna.<sup>151</sup>

(I am Arnaut who boats the air, chases the hare with the ox and swims against the stream).

- is not only a sign of the troubadours' precocity and predilection for rhetorical forms (the theme that Arnaut uses here is 'the world upside-down')<sup>152</sup> but a means of praising the virtue of his lady. For, in the opening strophe, he has said -

Qu'Amors marves plan'e daura

Mon chantar, que de liei mou

Qui pretz manten e governa.<sup>153</sup>

(Come quickly Love, polish and gild my singing which watches over worthiness).

150. Dante regarded Arnaut as one of his most illustrious predecessors and Petrarch described this troubadour as 'the grand master of love'. This praise has puzzled most contemporary critics, since they are inclined to disparage the formalism of his poems. Arnaut made constant use of the trobar clus (g.sup. p. 336 note 22).

151. Arnaut Daniel, *En cest sonet coind'e leri*, str. 7, vv. 43-45.

152. E.R. Curtius would describe these verses primarily as an attempt to display artistic ingenuity (v.op. cit., p. 97)

153. Arnaut Daniel, op. cit., str. 1, vv. 5-7. Even if Arnaut is only expressing a conceit, he is still honouring the name of Love.

Marie de Ventadour<sup>154</sup> invites her troubadour Gui d'Ussel<sup>155</sup> to a poetic debate by gently upbraiding him for ceasing to sing<sup>156</sup>, something that Bernard de Ventadour was constantly threatening to do,<sup>157</sup> and the Minnesinger Reinmar<sup>158</sup> displays his subtlety in a poem which depicts a lady trying to decide whether to suffer the requests which her lover makes of her in his lyrics or to forgo the blessings which his praises bring her.<sup>159</sup>

Andrew the Chaplain pays serious attention to the means by which a courtier can 'prove' his fitness for love.<sup>160</sup> Generosity is especially valuable; so, too, is blameless speech - the true lover does not blaspheme, he refrains from disparaging or mocking his fellow-men, and, above all, he is truthful.

- 154. The daughter of Raymond II de Turenne (and sister of Raymond III) who married Ébles V of Ventadour in 1191. Many troubadours addressed their lyrics to her.
- 155. The joint lord of Ussel who probably had to renounce his inheritance when he was appointed canon of Brioude and of Montferrand at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In 1208 the papal legate ordered him to stop composing. He died shortly before 1225.
- 156. Gui d'Ussel et Marie de Ventadour, «Gui d'Uissel, be-m pesa de vos, str. 1.
- 157. e.g. Bernard de Ventadour, *Lo tens vai e ven e vire*, str. 4; *Can vei la lauzeta mover*, strs. 7 and 8.
- 158. A contemporary and great rival of Walther von der Vogelweide. Gottfried von Strassburg laments the death of this poet 'von Hagenouwe' in *Tristan*. Since the romance was written during the first decade of the thirteenth century we know the approximate date of Reinmar's death and may infer that he was born in the middle of the twelfth century. One of his patrons appears to have been Leopold V of Austria.
- 159. Reinmar, *Sage, daz ich dirz iemer lone*, esp. strs. 2 and 4.
- 160. For the following summary cf. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., I, 6, pp. 59f., 81 f.; II, 1, pp. 151 f.; 8, pp. 184 ff.



He also keeps noble and worthy company. Furthermore, he should not be a lover of several women at the same time, but for the sake of one he should be a devoted servant of all. Finally, he should be hospitable. Guillaume de Lorris offers a similar list of virtues in The Romance of the Rose<sup>161</sup> and there were numerous other ensenhamens or 'teachings' of the courtly code, in both allegorical and systematic form, circulating in courtly society. Many of these 'teachings' were embodied in the work of romancers such as Chrétien who, of course, applied them where possible to both men and women. Chrétien's romances inculcate the value of constancy in love; of the lover's apprehensiveness and its outward signs - loss of appetite and sleeplessness, paleness and palpitations - when in the presence of the beloved, and of jealousy, or fear, in love.<sup>162</sup> While Chrétien would agree with Andrew that there is nothing to prevent a lover being loved by more than one member of the opposite sex<sup>163</sup> he would disagree that constancy (and so chastity, of which constancy is the sign) is consistent with the possibility of a new love replacing the

161. v. op. cit., pp. 44 ff., section 9, vv. 33 ff.

162. With the exception of the attitude to fidelity, these matters are all depicted in Ovid's The Art of Love. Chrétien presents them in, e.g., Cligès, vv. 541 ff., pp. 98 ff., vv. 3865 ff., p. 141, et al.

163. v. e.g. Lancelot, vv. 5379-5514, p. 339; cf. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., II, 8, p. 186 (Rule XXXI).

old one.<sup>164</sup> He would also heighten the importance of Andrew's view that a lover 'ought to be courageous in battle and hardy against his enemies'.<sup>165</sup> For in Chrétien's romances the supreme test of worth is no longer the troubadour's 'agility' in poetry (which is also ignored by Andrew) but the knight's agility in deeds of chivalry which can be performed in battle or in tournament. In the south, the ladies presided over and inspired the poets but in the north they assembled on the parapets or in the stands and admired the heroism of their knights, whom they presented with their talismans.<sup>166</sup> The chivalric ethos is a source of tension in Chrétien's romances for, as Nelli and Lavaud point out, capacity to fight well offers little proof of capacity to love well.<sup>167</sup> Whereas the troubadours' notion of 'courtesy' was neatly linked with love, the chivalric ideal was more likely to come into conflict with it.<sup>168</sup>

Having outlined the essential characteristics of courtly love we may now seek further clarification of specific points of interest for our theme of medieval sex ethics.

- 164. v. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., II, 8, pp. 185 f. (Rule XVIII; cf. Rules XII and XXX; cf. I, 6, p. 81 - Rule II). Chrétien rejected the adulterous form of courtly love. v. inf. pp. 393-398.
- 165. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., I, 6, p. 60.
- 166. v. e.g., Lancelot, vv. 5641 ff., pp. 541 ff..
- 167. R. Nelli and R. Lavaud, op. cit., pp. 551 f..
- 168. cf. inf., pp. 393-396.

First, we shall ask what value the sexual act has in the courtly code. We have already noted and criticized Briffault's argument for the crude and unparalleled sensuality of the courtly lyric.<sup>169</sup> All that Briffault offers his readers is a clumsy and insensitive treatment of the quite specific conception and delimitation of the sensual element in the poetry of the troubadours. For example, traces of the classical conception of the five stages of love (lineae amoris) - visus, allocutio, tactus, osculum et coitus - can be found in many courtly lyrics.<sup>170</sup> As we have seen, the troubadours rarely envisage proceeding to the final stage with their beloved. Nevertheless, where the schemes of Antiquity seems to have been more directly influential, this is not absolutely excluded. Thus Guiraut de Calanson<sup>171</sup> says to his lady -

En son palais on ela vai jazer,  
A cinq portals; et qui-ls dos pot obrir,  
Leu passa-ls tres, mas no-n pot leu partir;<sup>172</sup>

(In the palace where she (Love) reclines there are five doors; and he who can open two will easily pass through the other three, but he will not easily come out).

169. v. sup. pp. 339ff..

170. cf. R. Nelli, op. cit., pp. 181 f..

171. The lament which Guiraut composed on the death of Ferdinand, son of Alphonse VIII of Castille, indicates that this troubadour lived through the early years of the thirteenth century but we possess no further information about him. (Ferdinand died in 1214).

172. Guiraut de Calanson, Celeis cui am de cor e de saber, str. 4 vv. 25-27.

The final sentence indicates that Guiraut did not approve the bondage of love, and this perhaps explains the emphasis which he places on its sensual basis. For, in the anonymous allegory (The Castle of Love, which may have been influenced by Guiraut's poem, we find the usual reserve with regard to ultimate possession of the beloved:-

Las salas e-l torn desus  
 Son de manear lo plus  
 E de jazer en luec clus  
 Totas nudas ab los nus;<sup>173</sup>

(The great-rooms and the stage above them are made for fullest carressing and for reclining, in a secluded place, quite naked beside one's naked lover).

Andrew the Chaplain reduces the process of love to four stages which, he claims, were set forth in 'ancient times'. He says: 'the first consists in the giving of hope, the second in the granting of a kiss, the third in the enjoyment of an embrace, and the fourth culminates in the yielding of the whole person'.<sup>174</sup> He also appears to have been the first to apply another notion which derived from Antiquity - the three levels of friendship - to the courtly scheme. Later writers, such as Guiraut de Calanson, demote courtly love to the

173. Le château d'Amour, str. 16 vv. 91-94 (in R. Nelli et R. Lavaud, op. cit. pp. 242 ff.).

174. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., I, 6, p. 42.

lowest level.<sup>175</sup> For Andrew, however, the lowest level consists in taking someone at will, exercising one's sexual rights. This applies equally to the love of peasants and of the married.<sup>176</sup> The noblest form of love is pure love 'which binds together the hearts of two lovers with every feeling of delight. This kind consists in the contemplation of the mind and the affection of the heart; it goes as far as the kiss and the embrace and the modest contact with the nude lover, omitting the final solace, for that is not permitted to those who wish to love purely... this love goes on increasing without end, and we know that no one ever regretted practicing it, and the more of it one has the more one wants.' Such love does not corrupt anyone and is 'of such virtue that from it arises all excellence of character..., and God sees very little offense in it'. The intermediate level of friendship is mixed love, which 'gets its effect from every delight of the flesh and culminates in the final act of Venus'. Hence it 'quickly fails' and one often regrets it for it can greatly injure others. Nevertheless Andrew assures us that it 'is real love, and it is praiseworthy,

175. Guiraut de Calanson, *Celeis cui am de cor e de saber*, passim.

176. Andreas Capellanus, *op. cit.*, I, 6, pp. 106f. (the 'decision' of the Countess of Champagne); cf. I, 11, pp. 149 f..

and we say that it is the source of all good things, although from it grave dangers threaten, too.<sup>177</sup>

Andrew's analysis brings out the ambiguity and, therefore, the existential peril, of courtly love. Based on sexuality its conception of love requires the continual suspension of the 'final solace', of the sexual imperative to possess and be possessed. Though not impossible we may suspect that this is an ideal reserved for Gottfried's edele herzen. If this means that it is in constant danger of falling to the level of 'mixed love', and thus ceasing finally to be love, it also means that it is in danger of losing its sexual foundation altogether. The beloved is made a sacred object, the contemplation of whose nakedness is a secular form of the Platonic vision of the Beautiful and the Good, of the Augustinian contemplation of God 'face to face'. Hence we should not be surprised that the courtly ideal influenced religious, as well as secular, literature in the West.<sup>178</sup> Even at the non-religious level, however, it

177. Ibid, I, 6, pp. 122 f..

178. As Dawson states, St. Francis of Assisi desecularized and spiritualized the courtly conception of love (v. C. Dawson, Religion And The Rise of Western Culture, op. cit., p. 189). Jacopone da Todi, a Franciscan, was to become known as 'le jongleur de Dieu' (the minstrel of God). Petrarch's Laura and Dante's Beatrice testify to the spiritual duality of the romantic ideal.

questions whether the sexual act has a legitimate place in love. At best, as in Flamence, possession is the result of love whose validity has already, independently, been established. At worst, as Andrew's analysis reveals, it threatens the continued existence of love and is reserved primarily for those who cannot contain themselves.

Although Andrew considers that 'mixed Love' is perilous, he is determined to allow it. If this suggests that he is covertly highlighting the anti-Christian (because actually adulterous) nature of courtly love, it also reflects the manner in which the northern romancers handle the courtly theme. In nearly all the great romances the hero and heroine enjoy each other to the full, often in the married state. This aspect of the romance betrays the influence of chivalry and of church, both of which were stronger in the north than in the south until the middle of the thirteenth century at least. In Chrétien's Lancelot, the most 'courtly' of his extant works, sexual intercourse is not the terminus ad quem of love but the symbol of the lover's successful quest<sup>179</sup> and a point of departure for

179. Lancelot, vv. 4441 ff., pp. 326 ff., cf. especially his veneration of the Queen on first entering her room, vv. 4651 ff., p. 329.

further chivalric service from the hero. In essence the plot is interminable and even if Chrétien refused to complete the work for a different reason, it is appropriate that he did so.<sup>180</sup> In Marie de France's Lay of Eliduc Guildeloc graciously retires into a convent so that her husband can regularize and fulfil his love for Guillardun.<sup>181</sup> Although

180. Chrétien may have failed to complete the romance because he disliked its adulterous theme. Those who think that this was his reason usually regard his introduction, which states that the Countess of Champagne is responsible for the material and its treatment (vv.1-30; p.270), as confirmation of their case. However, Chrétien's aversion to adultery did not prevent him from completing a major part of Lancelot and, for this reason, some critics have supposed that a more urgent task distracted his attention. Since this is a mere surmise, we are inclined to accept a theory which has been presented by Jean Frappier (v. R.S. Loomis, ed., op. cit., p. 180). If the conclusion which a different poet appended to Chrétien's work was ordered by the Countess, its banality may well explain Chrétien's reluctance to continue. In other words, the sublime, yet dangerous, relationship of Lancelot and Guinevere could not proceed to the happy end which Chrétien usually managed to offer his heroes and heroines (cf. R. Bezzola, op. cit. Troisième Partie, p. 388). This theory presupposes that Chrétien could have brought Lancelot to a satisfactory conclusion without appearing to condone an adulterous form of love. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure of his ability to do so. In Cligés he informs us that he composed a romance 'Del roi Marc et d'Iseult la Blonde' (op. cit., vv. lff., p.91), which suggests that he contrived a plot in which the hero was Yseult's husband instead of Tristram (cf. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Troisième Partie, pp. 386 ff., where the author refers to the views of S. Hofer). Such treatment of the story could hardly match the version of Gottfried von Strasburg (or of Thomas of Britain) and would help to explain the failure to preserve Chrétien's work. In sum, if Frappier's theory is inadequate, we are entitled to suspect that Chrétien was unable to finish Lancelot because he was unable to discover an adequate means of expressing his distaste for its theme.

181. v. E. Mason (trans.), Lays of Marie De France and other French legends, Everyman, 1911, pp. 3-23.



the influence of chivalry and of church may have been important, however, it is worth noting that the narrative form enables the poet to free courtly love from identification with perpetual unsatisfaction and adultery. Whereas the lyric poet can only establish the 'sentimental' nature of love by postponing sexual fulfilment, the romancer can dispense with this limitation because his plot provides ample scope for characterization. In place of an 'eternal movement' of the heart he can offer an 'historical movement'. By coming to terms with the historical dimension of man's being, the romancers proved that their conception of love did not necessarily involve a flight from reality and, for this reason, the effect which romantic notions have had upon Western man's understanding of the basis and the nature of marriage is quite explicable. Before we examine the existential import of sentiment, however, we must consider the distinctive view of marriage which is presented in courtly poetry.

In the south the state of marriage is not rendered problematic by the courtly view but is reduced to a bare social necessity, which prevents neither partner from entering into an amorous relationship with a third party. Andrew the Chaplain summarizes the courtly attitude when he makes one of his exemplary lovers remind a lady that the purposes of marriage are procreation and payment of the

marriage debt. Affection may be found in marriage but it is in danger of being immoderate and it cannot be identified with love because, as Marie of Champagne pronounced, 'lovers give each other everything freely'.<sup>182</sup> C.S. Lewis correctly observes that this exclusion of love from marriage betrays the latter's function in feudal society. For the aristocracy marriage was little more than a means of extending the interests of the family.<sup>183</sup> Friendship with a member of the opposite sex had to be sought elsewhere. The quest for such friendship defied the chivalric and the ecclesiastical estimations of woman. If the former plainly preferred fraternal comradeship, the latter stipulated that woman was an inferior being whose natural role was maternal. Furthermore, the rejection of this teaching implied a challenge to the Church's view of marriage. How could the Church reasonably claim that its view of fidelity and the sacramental character of marriage placed a high premium on marital affection when it placed the partners on different spiritual levels and when it taught

182. Andreas Capellanus, *op. cit.*, I, 6, pp. 103, 106.

183. C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, O.U.P. 1936, p. 13.

that such affection heightened the danger of immoderate sexual behaviour? If some of the troubadours emulate the theologians by regarding sexual intercourse as an enemy of true love, that is not because they presuppose an asexual concept of love. If they divorce love from marriage less ambiguously than the theologians, that is because, showing a greater degree of social 'realism' than some of their critics will allow,<sup>184</sup> they sought a new social nexus for inter-sexual friendship.

In the north, for reasons we have already noted, preference was given to the view that sexual intercourse, and so marriage, could be proper vehicles for love. Here, then, the challenge to the church's view of marriage was not to remove the veneer of love, but to make this the essence of the relationship and to let nature's procreative purposes look after themselves. This, of course, implies just as strong a challenge to the Church's estimation of woman. Several critics have noted that the lays of Marie de France depict a world in which love is the

184. cf. e.g. R. Bezzola, *op. cit.*, Deuxième Partie, pp. 516 ff. Bezzola rightly discovers a contrast between the courtly ideal and certain aspects of 'la vie réelle' but this does not imply that the troubadours were inculcating a form of escapism (cf. *sup. pp.* 339ff. and note 37).

dominant force,<sup>185</sup> but it is equally evident that Marie does not consider love to be beneficial unless it finds its home in marriage.<sup>186</sup> We have already drawn attention to the 'happy end' which she contrived for Eliduc and his mistress, Guillardun.<sup>187</sup> A similar conclusion is reached in The Lay of the Ash Tree<sup>188</sup> and, in her other lays, those who indulge in extra-marital love usually come to a disastrous end.<sup>189</sup> Marie's lays may be regarded as a woman's 'answer' to the courtly ethos but they raise problems which she ignores. For an attempt to deal with them we must turn to the work of Chrétien de Troyes.

The first problem concerns the place of a marriage based on love in the social structure.<sup>190</sup> If love is an all-consuming

185. e.g. S. Painter, French Chivalry, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940, pp. 131-153; cf. A. Scaglione, op. cit., p. 23.

186. cf. S.F. Damon, Marie de France: Psychologist of Courtly Love, in P.M.L.A., vol. XLIV (December, 1929 - no. 4) pp. 968 - 996.

187. v. sup. p. 390 .

188. v. op. cit., pp. 91-101.

189. For example, Bisclavret's wife and her lover in The Lay of the Were-Wolf, (op. cit., pp. 83-90); the King and the seneschal's wife in The Lay of Ikuitan, (op. cit., pp. 105-111). Although Marie states that 'in the very nature of love...proportion cannot enter into the matter' (op. cit., p. 105 - The Lay of Ikuitan), she does not present this 'truth' in a manner which robs the conclusions of her lays of their significance. Thus she writes: 'The Lay of the Were-Wolf, truly, was written that it should ever be borne in mind' (op. cit., p. 90). Of course, she thought that a marriage which bound a young and beautiful wife to an old man was folly (cf. The Lay of Yonec, op. cit., pp. 125-136) but this only proves that she realized that marriage may sometimes be as dangerous as extra-marital love.

190. As our analysis of Eric and Enide and Yvain will show, this problem took the form of a conflict between the requirements of a 'courtoisie' and those of chivalry.

passion that can only mean that this form of marriage will be a menace to society, divesting the married of any sense of wider responsibility. Such is precisely the situation depicted in Erec and Enide. Chrétien tells us that 'Erec loved her with such a tender love that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments, nor have any desire to joust; but he spent his time in cherishing his wife. He made of her his mistress and his sweetheart'.<sup>191</sup> Enide hears the rumours of the knights and squires concerning this unfitting behaviour in one who, after all, is destined to become king, and she accidentally acquaints Erec with their complaints.<sup>192</sup> Erec then sets out on a series of chivalric adventures with his wife which serve, for each, as 'proof' of their worthiness to love.<sup>193</sup> Having passed the first 'test' of their mutual love Erec must next win the 'Joy of the Court' and so prove his

191. Erec and Enide, vv. 2293-2764; p. 32.

192. Supposing that Erec is asleep, Enide laments the decline in his companions' respect for him and he overhears (vv. 2293-2764; p. 33). Her anxiety reflects a concern for social honour which, if it becomes excessive, can threaten the well-being of a marriage. Chrétien deals with this problem in Yvain. v. inf..

193. Erec and Enide, vv. 2765 - 5366; pp. 36-70. The source from which Chrétien derived his romance seems to have suggested that Enide was guilty of adultery and that Erec doubted her fidelity (cf. I.L. Foster and J. Frappier in R.S. Loomis, ed., op. cit., pp. 194; 165-171). There is no hint of this state of affairs in Chrétien's version. On the contrary, he tells us that 'in her heart there was no guile' and that Erec commanded her to appear, not as a penitent, but as a courtly lady, dressed in her 'richest robe' and seated on her 'best palfrey' (vv. 2293 - 2764; pp. 33f.).

social responsibility before finally being crowned in the presence of King Arthur.<sup>194</sup> In Yvain Chrétien presents a complementary situation. Concern for social honour has jeopardized the love which is the foundation of marriage by causing the husband to ignore his wife. Hence the hero becomes a social outcast and has to prove, by chivalric feats, his desire and ability to serve ladies before he is accepted back into the marital fold. 'All has turned out well at last; for he is beloved and treasured by his lady, and she by him'.<sup>195</sup> Chrétien's answer to the social problem of marriage, then, is to propose a balance of responsibilities whereby those in marriage respect and uphold the demands of society and those in society do likewise for marriage.

Cligés represents Chrétien's treatment of the other main problem arising from his attempt to reconcile the courtly ideal with marriage. This concerns the random and 'given' manner in which love occurs.<sup>196</sup> Surely love such as this must sometimes conflict with the demands of marriage? For Chrétien this problem was presented in its most extreme form in the romance of Tristram and Yseult and, since Cligés is his 'reply' to the problem, he

194. Erec and Enide, vv. 5367 ff. ; pp. 70 ff.

195. Yvain, vv. 6799-6813, p. 269.

196. cf. sup. pp. 355ff..

provides it with a similar plot. Chrétien can be given full credit for the ingenuity with which he defends his cause but this only serves to underline his inability to resolve the basic problem. If the potion which led Tristram and Yseult to adultery has precisely the opposite effect in Cligés, where it preserves Fénice from her husband so that she may eventually marry and yield her virgin body to her lover,<sup>197</sup> that only provides an imaginative alternative and not an answer to the problem of the lovers Tristram and Yseult. Ultimately, there can be no 'answer' to such love. Chrétien can only present the alternative of making one's mistress one's wife and loving her still as one's mistress so that mutual love increases, and hope that this might encourage heroic renunciation among those 'trapped' like Tristram and Yseult.

Cligés is both the most 'realistic' and the most superficial of Chrétien's extant works. Contemporary in such matters as geographical and political detail and self-consciously anti-Tristram, it lacks those mysterious symbols and grand themes of 'initiation, dedication, metamorphosis and absorption into a higher and fuller life, at once more human

197. Cligés, vv. 3011-3394; pp. 130 - 135.

and more divine' which, as Heer says, make of Chrétien's other works 'so effective an exercise in depth psychology'.<sup>198</sup> Hence we agree with the same writer that Chrétien's romances employ a pedagogy which is superior to that devised by scholastic Christianity.<sup>199</sup> The forceful presentation of an ideal which, as Andrew the Chaplain realized, could not remain in the exclusive possession of the aristocracy helps to explain why the romantic notions of courtly poets soon began to influence the concrete attitudes and values of Western man.

#### C. The Value of Courtly Love.

Having noted some of the challenges which the courtly ideal issued to theological estimates of sex and marriage, we shall conclude with an examination of some broader claims which have been made for the ideal. These may be subsumed under three heads - the role of women, the importance of the sexual act, and the significance of marriage.

The 'hyperestimation' of the lady which forms the basis of the courtly conception of love reflects, in part, an increase in the influence of aristocratic women during the twelfth century. During the thirteenth century, however, the social role of

198. F. Heer, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

199. *Ibid.*



women, including those who belonged to the bourgeoisie, was gradually undermined and, by the end of the Middle Ages, it was virtually non-existent.<sup>200</sup> Since the forces which opposed an extension of the role of woman were deeply entrenched, we should not regard this sequence of events as proof of an inherent deficiency in the courtly ethos. However, the brevity of woman's appearance on the stage of medieval history at least raises the question whether, in more favourable circumstances, the courtly ideal could have sustained an appreciation of the wider role of women.

What is ultimately in question here is the degree to which the courtly lady represents a 'real' woman, that is, one whose distinctive qualities are allowed to contribute to relationships in which she is a genuine and responsible partner and not merely a means to ends which have been imposed upon her. Many critics would contend that the courtly portrait of woman is too idealistic.<sup>201</sup> When a Franciscan mystic or a Dante appropriated the courtly ethos for his particular purpose, they might argue, he was merely exploiting

200. cf. *Ibid*, p. 261.

201. cf. eg. F. Heer, *op. cit.*, p. 137 on the tragic-comedy of the 'courts of love' at which cases of amorous dispute were submitted to the judgment of the ladies. Andrew the Chaplain refers to some rulings of the Countess of Champagne in his treatment of the art of courtly love (v. e.g. *sup.* p. 376).

its latent 'spiritualism'.<sup>202</sup> Guillaume de Lorris' Rose is as neatly removed from the mundane sphere as the church's 'Rose of Heaven' whose worship, as Bezzola observes, was not unaffected by the lyric of the troubadours.<sup>203</sup>

Certainly there is much truth in these claims. We need only remind ourselves of the amour lointain of Jaufré Rudel to realize the place of this 'spiritual' tendency at the heart of the courtly ideal. Moreover, in the romances of Chrétien, who was so concerned about the place of love in society, a lady rarely moves the plot forward by her actions. Usually her mere presence suffices. She is the 'Prime Mover', sustaining the whole of the action, and the manly knights and their adversaries are her agents in the historical sphere. However, this analogy with the spiritual immanence of Islamic Aristotelians can be exaggerated. Even in Jaufré's poetry the sensual basis is not entirely lost and in Chrétien's romances figures such as Enide and Laudine do not lack verisimilitude. Thus the medieval church tended to equate the courtly ethos with sensuality and ignored the profound challenge of its attempt to derive spiritual values from a

202. I. Spitzer regards Jaufré Rudel as a direct precursor of Dante (v. op. cit., p. 2; cf. note 39 on pp. 701.).

203. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Deuxième Partie, p. 314; cf. sup. p. 388 ; note 178.

worldly source.<sup>204</sup> What are the characteristics which establish the 'worldly' identity of the courtly lady?

In order to answer this question we shall consider some of the claims which René Nelli makes for the courtly ideal. First he argues that it is the only genuine erotic system that Western man has ever constructed.<sup>205</sup> Our interest in this thesis stems from its implication that the lady fulfils the function of a sex-symbol. We should not be misled by the emphasis placed upon her nobility of birth, mind and virtue. This is only important because it raises the value of the gifts which, in token of her love, the lady can bestow upon her courtier.<sup>206</sup> Nelli's second important claim concerns the lover's 'hyperestimate' of his lady. This, he says, is the sole means available to love by which it can focus its

204. Some of the 219 doctrines which Bishop Tempier of Paris condemned in 1277 appear to represent courtly views but they make no reference to the element of moral idealism which informed the new conception of love. In order to explain this omission it is not necessary to adopt Nelli's hypothesis of a deliberate attempt to deprive courtly love of its spiritual vitality (v. op. cit., pp. 249 f.). For churchmen who believed that most forms of sexual commerce were manifestations of lust would not have appreciated the difference between the amor of the troubadours and the naturalistic type of love which Jean de Meun advocated in his portion of The Romance Of The Rose. They would also have been the first to observe that the courtly poets tended to influence the manners, rather than the morals, of their audience.

205. v. op. cit., pp. 338, 342.

206. cf. sup. pp. 385ff. on the various stages of love and the gifts which are appropriate to each stage.

attention upon and choose one person as its object.<sup>207</sup> In other words 'hyperestimation' does not indicate that the troubadours necessarily lose sight of the 'real' lady. On the contrary it is proof of their desire to find her. Furthermore, the possibility of discovering a living person amongst the members of the opposite sex is achieved by an original maximization of the distance which separates lover from beloved. The courtly lyric reflects, not passive acceptance of social distinctions, but appreciation of the worth of these and other (e.g. moral) distinctions. By restraining the sexual impetuosity of the male these barriers helped to promote a fuller, though still specifically sexual, personal relationship.<sup>208</sup>

For such reasons Nelli maintains that the courtly means of regulating the sexual relationship cannot be surpassed. On the one hand, it is natural. Instead of subjecting sexual love to a discipline which has been determined by heteronomous considerations - for example, theological definitions or sociological requirements - the courtly poets present a form of love which involves self-discipline.<sup>209</sup> On the other hand, it is reliable. Instead of proscribing passion because it

207. v. op. cit., pp. 340 f..

208. v. Ibid, pp. 344 f..

209. Ibid, pp. 217f., 342.

challenges the supremacy of reason or the love of God, the courtly poets transform it into sentiment.<sup>210</sup>

Nelli's estimation of the 'system' of courtly love repudiates any form of ethical monism. Values which correspond to certain human needs should not be allowed to usurp control over desires which they cannot satisfy. Since 'l'erotique des troubadours' was developed in response to a specific human need, then, Nelli is inclined to regard it as the only genuine form of sexual morality.<sup>211</sup> This attitude must be rejected because it implies that the various desires and values of man neither compete nor interact. Chrétien de Troyes realized that the troubadours had not spoken the last word on the sexual relationship because they had not related sentimental love to the pressures of social responsibility. He also appreciated that the virtues which they had 'discovered' should not be confined to relations between the sexes. Thus, Gawain, Chrétien's model of chivalry,<sup>212</sup> treats his fellow-knights with the honour and the respect which a lady was supposed

210. Ibid, pp. 344 f..

211. Nelli does admit that love must conform with social requirements but he emphasizes that it can therefore be threatened by social ideologies (v. op. cit. p. 342).

212. cf. W.A. Nitze, The Character of Gawain in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes, in Modern Philology, vol. L., no. 3 (February, 1952/3), pp. 219-225.

to receive from her courtier. As the courtly ideal began to transcend sexual matters, so it began to impinge on other views of morality and to become all-inclusive. Hyperestimation of the lady involved, not just a denial of misogynous attitudes, but a rebuttal of the ideas on which they were based. Finally, Andrew the Chaplain articulated a monism of courtly love. One of his 'courteous gentlemen' states: 'all men agree that no one does a good or courteous deed in the world unless it is derived from the fount of love. Love will therefore be the origin and cause of all good, and when the cause ceases, its effect must necessarily cease'.<sup>213</sup> Owing to the inter-connection of human needs, then, a set of values which claims to be genuine in one sphere of existence will inevitably tend to inform the whole of life.<sup>214</sup>

The ethical pretension of the courtly ideal also casts doubts on Nelli's account of its respect for the female person. The lady may be the embodiment of virtue and the goal of desire but, if her essential role is to 'cultivate' the virtues of the 'courteous gentleman', she remains a shadowy figure. Although

213. Andreas Capellanus, *op. cit.*, I, 6, p. 40.

214. Nelli recognizes the broader implications of the courtly ideal, especially its opposition to the ascetic spirit of medieval Christianity, and its tendency to inform the whole of life (*v. op. cit.*, pp. 215-219, 236-246), but he is so determined to exhibit the value of 'l'Amour provençal' that he under-estimates their significance.

she is no mere 'spiritual' object, woman is reduced to little more than a sex symbol and in this passive role she tends to lose her individuality. This is clearly the implication of Leo Spitzer's appreciation of the contribution which courtly poets made to Western society. He supports Ortega y Gasset's view that in the woman who is 'arresting', content merely to 'be' and to let man come to her, working towards his moral perfection, we can discern the marks of a great civilization. Spitzer argues that 'cette fiction d'érotisme' produces all that is piquant, refined and 'playful' in the life of society. The sexes are brought together by 'le 'désir' feint' but the necessity of 'amour lointain' holds them apart. Sexuality is here accepted and refined in face of the constant danger of disruptive passion which lurks on the horizon and which therefore warns man against feelings of moral presumption. But, if sexuality has been accepted, has woman too? Spitzer provides the ambiguous answer - only if she remains a sexual idol. She is 'la négativité absolue, l'incertitude vivante, productrice de tourments dans l'homme, mais aussi de culture morale'.<sup>215</sup>

In common with other idols the courtly lady did not lack influence over her devotees even though she was in constant danger of being overthrown. Her influence helps to explain the fulminations against luxury and effeminacy which clerics

215. L. Spitzer, op. cit., p. 33.

such as John of Salisbury directed at royal courts,<sup>216</sup> To these convinced 'masculinists', poets such as Bernard de Ventadour and the handsome, courteous heroes of the romances must have appeared most unmanly. To aristocratic audiences, however, the courtier typified, not effeminacy, but that balance between 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics which was appropriate in a man. Nevertheless, the source of courtly virtue was not immune from attack, her exalted position not beyond subversion. The same Bernard de Ventadour can sing -

De las dommas me dezesper;  
 Ja mais en lor no-m fiarai;  
 C'aissi com las solh chaptener,  
 Enaissi las deschaptenrai.<sup>217</sup>

(I despair of ladies; no longer will I trust them; as once I extolled them I will now disparage them).

Chrétien can present us, somewhat apologetically to be sure, with fickle Laudine as a heroine and with minor characters behind

216. cf. F. Heer, op. cit., p. 92.

217. Bernard de Ventadour, Can vei la lauzeta mover, str. 4, vv. 25-28.



whose charms there is much guile.<sup>218</sup> In the final book of The Art of Courtly Love - the rejection of love - Andrew the Chaplain shows that he can vie with the best misogynists.<sup>219</sup> Consigned to a passive role and thus prevented from emulating her suitor's combination of 'masculine' and 'feminine'

218. Laudine agrees to marry Yvain only a few days after the death of her former husband. Since a feudal lady had to find some means of protecting her property, Chrétien's audience might have expected Laudine to remarry quickly (cf. J. Frappier, op. cit., p. 183). However, Chrétien seems to have felt that an 'apology' for Laudine's behaviour was required because he emphasizes that the anxiety of her lieges was the chief factor in her decision to wed the lovesick Yvain (vv. 1507 - 2328; pp. 199-210). Moreover, Yvain's youthful impetuosity soon gives Laudine cause to regret her remarriage (vv. 2415-2773; pp. 211-216) and this may indicate that Chrétien regarded it as an indiscretion.

One of the dangerous characters in Chrétien's romances is a damsel whom Lancelot meets while he is engaged in the quest of Guinevere. When the knight proves reluctant to sleep with her, the young woman arranges for him to be assassinated. However, he fights with such gallantry that she feels obliged to dismiss his assailants and to let him resume his search for the queen (v. Lancelot, vv. 940 (approx.) - 1292; pp. 282 - 286).

Although Chrétien realized that the courtly lady was a rare creature, his attitude to women was usually sympathetic. This is confirmed by an incident which occurs near the end of Yvain. At the castle of Pesme Aventure ('ill fortune') the hero performs a series of chivalric feats in order that three hundred young spinsters may be freed from servitude. The 'realistic' description of the conditions in which they were living and working suggests that Chrétien was attacking the exploitation of women on feudal and monastic estates. (v. Yvain, vv. 5107 - 5820; pp. 246 - 254).

219. v. Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., II, pp. 187 ff., esp. pp. 200 - 209.

characteristics, the courtly lady even found that her function as an idol was threatened.<sup>220</sup> Should we ask why she was content to be such a fragile goddess, the answer surely consists in her desire to be accepted in friendship by men and, therefore to break down the walls separating monastic and chivalric fraternities from the life of wider society.<sup>221</sup> She would rather be a goddess than a rejected inferior! Moreover, some of the romancers sought to graft courtoisie on to the tree of marriage and thus offered her the prospect of a more equal relationship as the goal of love.<sup>222</sup> Thus she could aim at becoming an *Enide*, who transferred from one lord to another (father to husband) and discovered that the latter could also be a lover!

220. J. Coppin, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-138, shows how the poets who maintained the courtly tradition in the fourteenth century transformed the noble lady into 'la belle dame sans merci'. The fourteenth century also witnessed an increase in the volume of misogynous literature, much of which was due to Jean de Meun's rejection of the courtly theme in his section of *The Romance Of The Rose* (cf. Coppin, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-113 and esp. pp. 139-142).

221. cf. R. Nelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 285 f..

222. This variant of the courtly ideal eventually received the tacit approval of the medieval church. Iris Origo has observed that San Bernardino da Siena (1380 - 1444) 'was one of the first monastics...to defend a woman's right to be treated with both kindness and courtesy' (v. *The World Of San Bernardino*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1963, p. 55). This Franciscan preacher believed that the classical analysis of friendship was applicable to relations between husband and wife. Thus he argued that a man who derived profit, pleasure, and virtue from the attentions of his wife was bound to respect her. (Extracts from some of Fra Bernardino's sermons are included in G.G. Coulton (ed.), *A. Medieval Garner*, Constable & Co., London, 1910, pp. 605-613).

We should hardly expect to find that the courtly ethos turned 'the world upside down' to such an extent that a male-dominated civilization provided woman with an easy access to authority and power.<sup>223</sup> At best it acknowledged more honestly the power that no man can take from her and so it indirectly raised wider issues. At worst it suppressed its own implications by reducing her to a merely sexual object. If Christian 'charity' offered the possibility of a more than sexual friendship between the sexes, it was undermined by its tendency to define woman's natural role in maternal terms and so to regard her as an inferior being. The courtly ethos at least recognised that her sexuality involved functions other than reproduction and 'home duties'. For the rest, Heer's comment will suffice: 'The Middle Ages had conspicuously failed to solve the problem of woman's place in society; it was left as a heavy mortgage on the future'.<sup>224</sup>

Attention has already been drawn to the ambiguous estimation of sexual intercourse in the works of courtly poets, especially in the lyrics of the troubadours. Sexual communion is of fundamental importance because it is the goal of desire and the source of love's life but, for this reason, it is placed beyond the

223. V.A. Demant is one of many scholars who have stressed that 'romantic love is a masculine invention' (v. op. cit., p. 57, cf. pp. 86 f.).

224. F. Heer, op. cit., p. 266.

lover's reach. Love must be separated from possession for the latter bears the seeds of love's death. Now, while some forms of human love may operate in a sphere where desire to possess and be possessed is not in question,<sup>225</sup> this is manifestly untrue of love whose basic character is sexual. Most of the troubadours seem to have realized this because Jaufré Rudel does not speak for the majority. Nevertheless, even in the lusty southern romance, Flamenca, which was composed in the thirteenth century, the lovers are not permitted to enjoy the final solace until their affection is quite mature.<sup>226</sup> This prompts us to suggest that the distance between the lovers is so prolonged that the act of intercourse tends to become a mere addendum to love.<sup>227</sup> Nelli may be quite correct in blaming the bland acceptance of adultery and the neat separation of love and coitus for the contemporary crises over

225. Christian agape may be an example of such love. This possibility is overlooked by M.C. D'Arcy (v. op. cit.). He is convinced that agape is not only a mode of activity but a form of being. Hence it includes the desire for union (eros) as well as the desire to do good.

226. According to the courtly code Flamenca was entitled to commit adultery with William because she was encumbered with a jealous husband (v. R. Nelli et R. Lavand, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 12, 624). However, the author of the romance stipulates that passion must be purified by the joy of mutual affection before this privilege may be exercised (cf. R. Nelli, op. cit., pp. 172 - 174, referring to vv. 6569 ff. of the romance).

227. In other words, coitus is but a sign of affection (cf. R. Nelli, op. cit., p. 339).

marriage and sexual relationships. But when he suggests that the only adequate remedy will be a renewed respect for the troubadours' idea of love (rather than an application of 'external' moral constraint) he overlooks those very features of the courtly ideal which he considers to be symptoms of the current crisis!<sup>228</sup> For 'the erotic of the troubadours' may presuppose desire for love's supreme joy but it is by no means sure that desire benefits from satisfaction. When sexual intercourse is approved it is usually treated, not as an integral element in love, but as a sign or confirmation of genuine affection. Either explicitly or implicitly, then, the courtly poets allow coition to signify desires other than love, for example, chivalric lust, desire for an heir, or God's will to preserve his creation. Those who are most critical of any of these significations are also the strongest advocates of moderation (mezura) in the physical expression of love.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, even if courtly love is not necessarily adulterous it usually was. Its most sublime form was a communion of hearts, not of bodies but, in view of the identity of the participants, we may well ask with Coppin: 'comment ne pas

228. v. R. Nelli op. cit., pp. 344ff..

229. Marcabru was the first to express this attitude.

voir là déjà une atteinte à l'intégrité du mariage?<sup>230</sup> The force of this question cannot be diminished by pointing to the debased character of marriage in the twelfth century. For the courtly idealists recognized, and often emphasized, the 'random' character of love. Love bears within its nature no guarantee that it will conform to human social orders and it demands allegiance even when these conflict with it. Despite this 'given' character, however, it does not obliterate the human will. Herein lies Chrétien's final - and only - hope of combatting the Tristram theme. The 'paradoxical' character of love corresponds with a profound psychological reality. Thus the lover senses that his beloved has been chosen for him as well as by him ('since we were children together, I have loved and courted her'<sup>231</sup>). However, just as the sense of choice undermined de Rougemont's attempt to interpret the courtly ethos in the light of Tristram alone, so the sense of predestination indicates that love is of itself inadequate to support the order of marriage in the manner Nelli seeks.

We have yet to decide whether Chrétien de Troyes succeeded in his attempt to show that the courtly ideal included mutual sexual possession. Although his interpretation of the courtly theme is plausible, we should observe that he usually rests content with an announcement of love's supreme joy and rarely

230. J. Coppin, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

231. Bernard de Ventadour, *Lo gens tens de pascor*, str. 4, vv. 25f.

attempts to depict it at length or to found a new development of the plot upon it. In Erec and Enide it is not the joy itself but its overindulgence which brings it into conflict with wider responsibilities and so advances the plot. Similarly, in Lancelot the hero's enjoyment of Guinevere only moves the plot forward when it is discovered by a third party. Nevertheless, by identifying love with actual joy Chrétien does make the latter a necessary symbol, rather than an accidental sign, of the love which sustains a whole series of adventures. In addition, it is legitimate to argue that those who criticize the romancers on account of their failure to depict marital bliss<sup>232</sup> themselves fail to suggest the nature of this bliss and therefore fail to establish the import of their criticism. Perhaps these critics deal in a 'sacramental romanticism'. Chrétien shows greater 'realism' when he draws attention to the stresses which social responsibilities may bring upon a marriage whose basis is mutual love. However, he shows an equally marked lack of 'realism' when he describes the joy which accrues to lovers who forget these responsibilities. Here we discover another implication of the courtly conception of joy. If desire for love's final solace is in danger of forfeiting actual enjoyment, it is also in danger of grossly over-estimating its importance.

232. e.g. J. Coppin, op. cit., pp. 128f., 131, 143.

Theologians and philosophers are frequently, and rightly, charged with forcing life's simpler joys to bear a burden of significance which they cannot sustain. Although Chrétien can refer to the 'sporting' character of sexual activity, he tends to equate sexual fulfilment with the joy which is the goal of life and thus to make it a matter of the utmost gravity.<sup>233</sup>

The reader is deeply grateful to the knights whose disapproval forces Erec and Enide to suspend their cloying relationship. The courtly ideal knows little of the sportive character of sexual behaviour. There is a great difference between the courtly lyric and the 'pastoral' in which the poet usually sings the praise of the more amenable charms of a peasant girl, a 'failing' one may well overlook in order to enjoy the simple vivacity of the verse.<sup>234</sup>

In our remarks on the courtly estimation of the lady we pointed out that respect for the 'distance' which separates persons is a necessary condition of a genuine meeting with them. However, the ambiguous attitude to sexual intercourse in courtly literature confirms our suspicion that initial respect alone cannot guarantee the formation of a lively personal relationship. Even Chrétien de Troyes, who emphasizes the joy of love's sexual fruition, assigns an essentially passive role to his heroines.

233. v. e.g. Erec et Enide, vv. 2293 ff.; pp. 30ff.

234. v. e.g. Marcabru, L'autrier jost'una sebissa. In this poem Marcabru presents a girl who counsels and practises that self-control (mezura) which he could not find among the aristocracy.



His theme is always the self-discovery and self-improvement of the individual man in service of his ideal. We must therefore beware of exaggerating the degree to which the courtly, or any other, form of medieval life and literature appreciated the social character of an historical individual.<sup>235</sup> The medieval 'individual' remained primarily as Augustine had conceived him: a man alone with his god. Hence we may agree with Aldo Scaglione that those who have thought that respect for the individual is a legacy of the Middle Ages have probably been led astray by an inappropriate syllogistic argument, namely, that it follows from Christian emphasis on the individual and the 'Christian' character of the Middle Ages.<sup>236</sup>

We have already noted that courtly literature was in part a critique of other medieval views of marriage. In particular we discovered that the northern romancers rejected the church's view of the marital relationship and implied that it was self-contradictory. This has further implications. From New Testament times until the medieval period at least Christian theology had very little to say about the events which may lead to marriage. This is quite explicable, and clearly sensible, if all that the church intends to teach is that marriage,

235. Nevertheless, R. Gregor Smith was not guilty of great exaggeration when he suggested that the troubadours perceived some of the implications of human historicity (v. R. Gregor Smith, *The New Man*, S.C.M., 1956, p. 39 ; and cf. sup. pp. 378ff. on the courtly conception of personal integrity).

236. v. A. Scaglione, op. cit., p. 164, note 35.

like other forms of social relationship, must be transformed by love (agape). Such would appear to have been the aim of those New Testament authors who described the responsibilities of marriage in terms of the 'household codes' which circulated in contemporary society.<sup>237</sup> These codes should be followed 'as is fitting in the Lord' (ὡς ἄνηκεν ἐν Κυρίῳ ; Colossians 3:18). The writer to the Ephesians develops his suggestive thoughts on marriage out of one such code. This suggests that he discerned sacramental significance in agape in marriage and not in the order itself. We have found precisely the opposite tendency among medieval theologians. Those who like to think that, by establishing the order of marriage as a sacrament, the church automatically heightened the importance of marital love should reflect upon the contrast between the Biblical and the medieval priorities. Whereas the writer to the Ephesians paid great attention to love, later theologians preferred to discuss the rearing of children, the payment of the marriage-debt, and the symbolism of a lifelong union which bound an inferior being to a 'lord'. If marriage is a sacrament of divine love, however, theology must surely emphasize the 'neighbourly' role of the partners and, possibly, the value of their pre-marital relationship, rather than the demands and requirements which they must fulfil. Of course, most of the theologians whose work has

237. v. Colossians 3:18 ff.; Ephesians 5:21 ff., I Peter 2:18 ff..

been examined in previous chapters presumed that the formation and the character of a proper sexual relationship had been adequately described in the New Testament. Thus they thought that the factors which give rise to marriage could be reduced to the 'burning' desire of which Paul had written to the Corinthians and that the virtues which should inform the marital relationship had been identified by those Biblical authors who counselled wives to obey their husbands and husbands to cherish their wives. When the medieval church began to acquire control of matrimonial affairs it had to produce a legal definition of marriage and, as a result, theologians (and canon lawyers) developed an interest in the conditions under which the sacrament was performed. Hugh of St. Victor asserted the integrity of the individual, which was frequently violated by the feudal lord,<sup>238</sup> by stressing that a marriage was invalid if the consent of the partners was not freely given.

As courtly society appreciated, however, defence of free choice was hardly adequate. Nothing less than a new estimation of sexual love was required. Theologians who have escaped the influence of ascetic modes of thought may respect this demand but they should not give unqualified approval to the categorical terms in which it was presented. For agape, which 'goes about

238. v. G.G. Coulton, The Medieval Village, op. cit., pp. 82 f., 250, and Appendices 14 f.

doing good', is difficult to reconcile with sexual love, which desires to possess and to be possessed by the other person. Hence the theologian must insist that eros is a dangerous basis for marriage because it is not only erratic but insistent and, therefore, an obstacle to the freedom of Christian love. He should teach that a marriage will be incomplete unless each partner is prepared 'to be a neighbour to' the other and he should warn that the Good Samaritan did not have to face such a constant test. Having done so, he may realize that his medieval predecessors and some of his contemporaries have failed to discern the real, though limited, value of the romantic sentiment.

The medieval church recognized that its heritage of ascetic and Augustinian theology might be undermined by the new form of eros and it therefore condemned courtly 'doctrine' and sought to divert the romantic elan into mystical channels.<sup>239</sup> Although the church exerted great influence upon medieval society, this attempt to outlaw the courtly ethos was bound to fail. For the poets imagined, and the nobility 'staged', a relationship between the sexes<sup>240</sup> which, despite its heretical

239. cf. J. Coppin, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-131 and v. sup. pp. 399f..

240. This does not mean that courtly love was merely a conceit or a formality. v. sup. pp. 339ff.

formulation, would earn the approval of many who regarded marriage as a sacrament of divine love. Contemporary theologians have rarely observed that, in contrast with agape, romantic love is able to initiate an intimate sexual partnership. Whereas Christian love is no respecter of persons, the courtly erotic is founded upon 'hyperestimation' of the beloved and thus offers a means of forming a particular relationship on a basis of mutual respect. W.G. Cole, who dismisses the romantic sentiment as desire for a mother-substitute<sup>241</sup>, places great reliance upon considerations of psychological maturity and compatibility in his 'critical reconstruction' of a theology of marriage.<sup>242</sup> Although these matters are important, they cannot guarantee the stability of a marriage. As Chrétien de Troyes realized, a marriage derives vitality from the partners' will to serve one another. In other words, marriage provides a new context for growth in responsibility and we should not be so bold as to say that romantic sentiment will never assist those who have to meet this challenge. This form of love may not be essential but critics who interpret it according to a single category of thought - psychological,

241. v. his remarks on 'infantile love' in op. cit., pp. 24 f..

242. v. op. cit., pp. 281-323, esp. pp. 311-316.

sociological, or ideological - can never do justice to its varied potential.<sup>243</sup>

There are scholars who would argue that the romantic sentiment is dead or dying in contemporary Western culture.<sup>244</sup> They might suggest that the dress and the behaviour of some sections of modern youth indicate a declining appreciation of the value of a 'distance' between the sexes. The struggle for the emancipation of women has been partly responsible for the removal of some barriers which formerly separated men from women. This movement has profited from the growing pluralism of Western society. In order to operate an intricate social system a variety of functions must be performed and the skills of women must be utilized. The complexity of social roles and the adaptability of those who fulfil them may seem to preclude the simple 'hyperestimation' of the beloved from which courtly love arises. However, those who think that the romantic spirit is only dormant can rightly argue that it

243. This does not mean that they cannot make a modest contribution to our understanding of romantic love. However, we would point out that the 'psychologists' often exaggerate the blindness of sentiment. The troubadours encouraged a lady to cultivate a (limited) set of virtues because they realized that affection could arise from discernment.

244. e.g. V.A. Demant, op. cit., p. 51. He emphasizes the minor role of the romantic theme in contemporary literature.

has already declined and revived several times,<sup>245</sup> while those who think that it is still active can refer to the romances which appear in numerous magazines and to the 'Hollywood' love-story, which shares Chrétien's predilection for 'un happy end'<sup>246</sup> as proof of its continuing influence.<sup>247</sup> In addition, they may admit that the courtly attitude is no longer easy to adopt but emphasize that it always reflected the will or the heart of a man rather than his place in society. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* may represent a form of romantic love which is indeed impossible to-day.<sup>248</sup> *Gatsby's* 'amour lointain', nourished for five years, means that the Daisy of his dreams has lost all contact with the Mrs. Buchanan whose spirit has been stifled by the social life of New York.<sup>249</sup> When she seeks to escape from the sordid reality by conforming

245. e.g. R. Nelli, op. cit., p. 338. He observes that 'l'Amour provençal' has invariably reappeared when factors such as libertinage, 'cameraderie', or boredom, and external pressures such as patriotism or religious enthusiasm have begun to jeopardize the integrity of the sexual relationship.

246. cf. R. Bezzola, op. cit. Troisième Partie, p. 388.

247. cf. D. de Rougemont, op. cit., pp. 231 ff. He notes the influence of 'le film américain' and regards its partiality for 'le happy end' as one element in the bourgeois profanation of the Tristram myth.

248. v. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, Penguin, 1950.

249. v. esp. Ibid, pp. 102 f..

to her alter imago the only possible result is tragedy, not of a heroic, but of a futile character. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald begins his novel by praising Gatsby's 'extraordinary gift for hope',<sup>250</sup> and later refers to his 'creative passion' and 'the colossal vitality of his illusion'.<sup>251</sup> Hence the reader learns that the monstrosity of the illusion cannot detract from the passion and the vitality of hope. Whereas the characters who surrounded Mrs. Buchanan were unable to conceive a future, Gatsby, whose only fault was an unbridled imagination, 'turned out all right at the end'.<sup>252</sup>

250. Ibid, p. 8.

251. Ibid, p. 103.

252. Ibid, p. 8.



C: THE SYSTEMATIZATION OF THE TRADITION

-8-

ETHICS AS ORDER : Thomas Aquinas\*

While the troubadours and their northern counterparts were singing the praise of courtly love, the theologians were developing the scholastic method of dealing with the matters in which they were interested. The latter enterprise, which originated in the analytical and systematic work of men such as Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, and Hugh of St. Victor, involved a great many scholars, most of whom are no longer remembered outside academic circles. Although we cannot expect to rectify this situation, we should at least mention a few of the schoolmen who laid the foundations on which Thomas Aquinas was able to build his monumental Summa Theologica. Nobody played a more decisive part in the formation of scholasticism than Peter Lombard, an Italian theologian who became bishop of Paris in 1159, the year before his death. Earlier in the same decade this former pupil of

\* References to the works of Thomas will be made as follows :-

S.T. I-II, iv, 3, ad 1 = Summa Theologica, First Part of the Second Part, question 4, article 3, reply 1; S.O.G. III, 112, p. 88 = Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 3, Chapter 112, page 88 in the relevant volume of the edition published between 1923 and 1929 by Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd. in London for the English Dominican Fathers. More than one edition of the Summa Theologica has been consulted (v. Bibliography, pp. 615 f.). Wherever possible I have quoted from the text of the new Dominican translation. Since this edition is providing extensive cross references, I have usually refrained from doing so. When controversial issues are discussed, however, cross references are provided.

Hugh of St. Victor produced The Four Books of Sentences, an exhaustive and conservative appraisal of the opinions which had been expressed on theological issues. This was soon acknowledged to be the standard work on theology and its influence did not decline until the close of the Middle Ages. It provided the schoolmen with much of the information on which their disputations were based and it was also the subject of numerous commentaries. Among those who sought to interpret the 'Sentences' were Albert the Great, the teacher of Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure, the Franciscan who was Thomas' principal rival. Thomas himself wrote a commentary on the 'Sentences' but it was to be overshadowed by his Summa Theologica which is properly regarded as the finest product of scholastic theology.

Although Thomas had not completed the third and final part of the Summa Theologica when he died in 1274 he had accomplished the bulk of his task, which was to investigate every subject of theological concern. The general significance of such an undertaking has already been noted but it deserves to be amplified. A theologian who attempts to comprehend the divine purpose from creation to eschaton gives expression to a firm trust in Providence. In the medieval context this theological project signified a recovery of confidence in the stability of the world and thus a fresh hope for society which was struggling to pacify the various spheres of life. It also signified a new confidence in man himself and, in

particular, the conviction that the means of appropriating divine protection lay in the faculty of reason. Hence the schoolman did not shrink from applying his mind to the most abstract of metaphysical topics or to the most specific of ethical issues. Further evidence of this optimistic rationalism is provided by the manner in which Thomas discusses the problems which he raises in the Summa Theologiae. He frequently refers to the views of classical philosophers and he ascribes as much authority to Aristotle as to the Fathers of the church. However he was well aware of the difference between philosophy and theology.<sup>1</sup> None of the questions which he discusses is left unanswered, although we are sometimes told that a different conclusion may be reached.<sup>2</sup> Thomas advocates his own solution by means of a dialectical method which betrays his confidence in reason's ability to discern the Truth and thus helps to explain the harshness with which he (and other scholastics) thought that heretics should be treated. He enumerates the arguments for the improper answer and then proceeds to expound the alternative which is finally validated by a rebuttal of the original arguments. Another feature of the Summa Theologiae is an increase in the number of technical terms. This reflects the new clarity and precision of thought which arose from the scholastic commitment to rational procedures. We would agree with G.G. Coulton that scholasticism endowed Western man with a great ability to

1. S.T. I, i, 1.

2. e.g. S.T.I, xc, 4.

cope with general concepts.<sup>3</sup>

Since reason helps to determine both the scope and the shape of the Summa Theologica, we are not surprised to discover that Thomas locates the divine image in the mind of man.<sup>4</sup> The mind is capable of 'discernment and intelligence',<sup>5</sup> which are the means by which 'direction and measure come to human acts'.<sup>6</sup> However, this does not mean that reason ceases to be an instrument of theological enquiry and becomes a fundamental principle of theology. For the man who exercises his mind remains prone to falsehood and uncertainty. He may give proof of his capacity to 'take part in Providence' by directing the temporal affairs in which he and others are engaged,<sup>7</sup> but such 'sharing in the Eternal Law by intelligent creatures'<sup>8</sup> is neither complete nor stable. Hence Thomas remarks that 'man has an innate bent towards virtue, yet to come to its fulness he needs to be educated'. The natural law, which comprises those parts of the Eternal Law that are available to reason, must therefore be supplemented by the more specific regulations of human law and these must be reinforced by sanctions because some men possess such a weak

3. G.G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama, C.U.P., 1945, p. 430. He suggests that the scholastics provided later generations with the distinction between quality and quantity.

4. S.T. I, xciii, 6.

5. S.T. I, xciii, 2.

6. S.T. I-II, xc, 1.

7. S.T. I-II, xci, 2.

8. Ibid.

tendency to virtue that the only way to 'educate' them is to restrain them from evil 'by fear and force'.<sup>9</sup> Although Thomas thought that man could establish laws which would encourage the practice of virtue, he realized that the law could not be a reliable guide unless the limitations of human reason were overcome. For this reason he asserted that no man could attain the happiness to which his 'natural principles' directed him 'without the Divine assistance'.<sup>10</sup>

If man is to arrive at 'supernatural happiness', which is commensurate with his intellectual substance, the soul,<sup>11</sup> but greatly exceeds the natural capacities of the whole man (totus homo), soul and body,<sup>12</sup> he will have to place even greater reliance upon divine aid. He will need to receive from God the grace which is the principle and the root of the infused virtues. The most important of these virtues are faith, hope, and charity and Thomas describes them as theological.<sup>13</sup> Whereas moral and intellectual virtues can be cultivated by man, the theological virtues are 'infused in us by God alone'.<sup>14</sup>

9. S.T. I-II, xcv, 1.

10. S.T. I-II, lxii, 1.

11. S.C.G. II, 46ff., pp. 109ff.,

12. S.T. I-II, lxii, 1.

13. S.T. I-II, cix, 4, ad 3; cf. lxii, 3.

14. S.T. I-II, lxii, 1.

Since they also 'direct us aright to God',<sup>15</sup> they are able to supply and to confirm the other virtues which are required of man. Unless man possesses the theological virtues, then, his life will not be oriented towards God and he will fail to achieve the beatific vision for which he was created. Reason cannot provide him with the resources which he needs in order to reach his proper goal and he must therefore find a higher authority. This is none other than God himself, whose revelation, 'contained in Holy Writ',<sup>16</sup> informs man of the theological virtues and whose Eternal Law is the foundation of the natural law that human reason can discern.<sup>17</sup> The revelation which is conveyed by Scripture cannot be subjected to the vagaries of human interpretation. Christ has therefore invested the Pontiff with divine authority which enables the Church to lead men in the paths of truth and righteousness.<sup>18</sup> The church also presents man with such authorities as the canon law, which contains the decrees of Popes and ecclesiastical councils, and the writings of the Fathers.<sup>19</sup>

15<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. S.T. I-II, xci, 2.

18. S.T. II-II, i, 10; cf. v, 3; clxviii, 3; S.C.G. IV, 50 p. 185.

19. Thomas usually refers to these authorities in order to introduce the question which he proposes to discuss.

The Summa Theologica includes a number of extraordinary articles in which Thomas seeks to justify the Fathers' use of particular terms in the discussion of a theological subject.<sup>20</sup> This attempt is based on the false presupposition that the semantic precision of scholasticism could find its match in every earlier school of theology. Thomas thus betrays an ignorance of history which was to prejudice many of the insights of scholastic theology.<sup>21</sup> Of the historical factors which exerted an influence upon his own thought, none was more important than the programme of ecclesiastical reform that Gregory VII had initiated in the latter half of the eleventh century. A feature of this campaign was the reinstatement of the canon law. Compilations such as the Decretum of Gratian<sup>22</sup> were of great service to a Church which was striving to implement that authority over men and nations which Gregory had conceived. Thomas was not disposed to challenge the legal instrument of ecclesiastical power. On the contrary, he invariably defends the provisions of canon law. Thus the editor of a Dominican translation of the Summa Theologica can apologize for its treatment of the sacrament of marriage

20. e.g. S.T. I-II, lxxxiv, 3; 4; lxxxv, 3; II-II, cxliii, 1; cliii, 5.

21. cf. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., pp. 412 ff.

22. Gratian published this definitive code of the canon law in 1148.

by explaining that Thomas was simply following the pre-Tridentine legislation.<sup>23</sup>

The scale on which the Summa Theologica was composed is so great that anyone who seeks to expound the views which Thomas held on a particular subject is confronted with a delicate problem. He must avoid paying too much attention to the subtle questions which will arise during his analysis of the general principles on which Thomas based his conclusions. Nevertheless, consideration of the basic concepts will have to be sufficient to reveal the logic of the conclusions. In sum, the expositor needs to remember that he is dealing with a theological work and not with a legal code. We shall endeavour to arrive at a balanced view of the Thomist<sup>24</sup> ethics of sex by examining sections of the Summa Theologica which possess general, as well as specific, relevance. In the course of our investigation we shall have occasion to note opinions which Thomas expressed in his more apologetic Summa Contra Gentiles. The order in which we shall discuss the various matters of interest will be similar to that which Thomas himself adopted. Thus we shall begin with an examination of the intrinsic value which he discerned in sexuality. In other words, we shall ignore the conditions under which man

23. v. vol. 19 (Supplement QQ. xxxiv - lxxviii) of the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., London, 1922, pp. 54, 58, 126, v. inf. p. 522, note 273 on the nature of the material which is contained in the Supplement.

24. Throughout this chapter the adjective, 'Thomist', will be used in order to refer to the views which Thomas himself held.



now engages in sexual activity and shall allow Thomas to explain the purpose with which God bestowed sexuality upon the rational creation. Our next task will be to analyse his interpretation of original sin in order to ascertain the manner in which he thought sexuality had been corrupted. In the light of the foregoing investigations we shall be able to appreciate the restrictions which Thomas applies to sexual behaviour when he elaborates the implications of the virtue of temperance, the sacrament of marriage, and the state of celibacy. His treatment of marriage and celibacy will also reveal some of his beliefs concerning the redemption which Christ offers to man. However, we shall have to look more closely at his conception of the role which the Virgin fulfilled in the drama of salvation. When we have done so we shall be in a position to assess the contribution which Thomas made to the Christian attitude to sexual behaviour.

#### A. The Thomist view of sexuality.

Anthropology is but one of the many spheres of thought in which Thomas is content to develop the views of Aristotle. Thus he regards man as a composite being who comprises both a soul and a body. Although man lacks the simple unity of the angels, he has a logical unity of being since the soul, or 'intellectual substance', is 'the formal

principle of being to matter, as communicating its being to matter'.<sup>25</sup> What Thomas means here is not that the presence of the soul merely activates matter so that the 'stuff' of which man is made can begin its autonomous operation. His is no mechanistic view of man, as his opposition to Averroism proves.<sup>26</sup> In giving life to the body the soul of man informs his material being so that this 'is touched inasmuch as it suffers and is moved. Now this is according as it is in potentiality; and potentiality regards the whole'.<sup>27</sup> When the soul unites with the body, then, it determines that what was formerly mere possibility of action will begin to act. As Thomas puts it, the 'active power of an agent' can now 'reduce it to act'.<sup>28</sup> This notion of 'reduction' is important since it emphasizes the priority of the soul in establishing the activities of man. Matter is 'in potentiality' to many forms of which the 'intellectual substance' is but one.<sup>29</sup>

25. S.C.G. II, 68, pp. 171 f., cf. 56, p. 136.

26. cf. esp. S.C.G. II, 59-61, pp. 146-161.

27. S.C.G. II, 56, p. 136; cf. 72, pp. 180-182.

28. S.C.G. II, 71, p. 179; cf. 7, p. 10.

29. S.C.G. II, 40, p. 88. This principle is not contradicted by the fact that the human body is 'disposed' or 'fitted' to receive the soul (e.g. S.C.G. II, 61, p. 180; 62, pp. 180-182; S.T.I, xci, 3) and may even influence the activity of the soul (e.g. S.C.G. II, 69, pp. 222f; 70, p. 226; 71 pp. 229 f.; S.T. I-II, lxxiii, 1) because 'the human soul is a form independent of matter as to its being' and would not be subject to material influence if it had not united with the body and so 'formed' human nature. (S.C.G. II, 71, p. 227; cf. 68, pp. 171f.). Thus the influence which the body exerts upon the soul does not call the sheer potentiality of matter in question.

When this matter unites with matter it directs its operation according to some, but not all, of its possibilities. In other words, the soul is the act of the body. We might say that it not only activates the body but directs it too. It gives not just life but a style of life to man.<sup>30</sup> Hence we should not be misled when Thomas describes human being as a logical unity. He does not mean that this unity is perceived by reason alone. Man is a self-mover,<sup>31</sup> one who can govern and direct his own behaviour.<sup>32</sup> In all such beings there must of necessity be two parts, 'one of which is mover and the other moved'.<sup>33</sup> When Thomas says that man is a logical unit he means also that man is an operational unit.

The unity of human being is further exemplified by what Thomas proceeds to say about its two parts, especially by his remarks concerning the material or bodily part. He tells us that 'the matter of every form is adapted to it according to its requirements. Now the more noble and simple a form is, the greater is its power ; and consequently the soul which is the noblest of the lower forms, though simple in

30. J.B. Kors, O.P., La Justice Primitive Et Le Péché Originel D'Après S. Thomas, Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1930, p. 114, states that Thomas regarded the soul as the principle of individuality. 'L'individu est donc le terme de la nature...La nature n'existe que dans l'individu'.

31. S.C.G. II, 60, p. 152.

32. S.T. I-II, xci, 2.

33. S.C.G. II, 70, p. 177.

substance, is manifold in power and has many operations. Wherefore it needs various organs in order to accomplish its operations, of which organs the various powers of the soul are said to be the acts; for instance sight of the eye, hearing of the ears, and so forth'.<sup>34</sup> In the Summa Theologica he defensively states that 'if there seems to be any fault in the human body's constitution it must be taken that such a fault is a necessary consequence of the material used to give the body its required adaptation to the soul and the soul's activities'.<sup>35</sup>

The body is thus made for the sake of the soul among whose operations we may note those of sight and hearing. While the soul performs certain operations by means of the body, however, its activities are not confined to such as can be accomplished by this means. As we have seen it is the soul that determines man's style of life. Now, it is from its form that a thing derives its species,<sup>36</sup> that is to say, the character which distinguishes it from other things and so serves to define it. What distinguishes man from 'other animals' is 'intelligence and reasoning, which is the

34. S.C.G. II, 72, pp. 181f..

35. S.T. I, xci, 3.

36. e.g. S.C.G. II, 59, p. 150; S.T. I-II, xviii, 2.

operation of man, as man, as Aristotle states (*Ethic*). Therefore we must place in man a principle that properly gives him his species<sup>37</sup> and this must be the rational soul or intellectual substance.<sup>37</sup> In virtue of this principle, for which the technical term was the 'possible intellect',<sup>38</sup> the human mind can extend its operations to a consideration of universals. According to Thomas this proves that 'the intellect has not a common operation with the body' whose operations, and so those of the soul which are related to them, extend only to particulars.<sup>39</sup> The 'intellective soul' thus 'surpasses the condition of corporeal matter' since in its operation 'corporeal matter has no part. And yet since the human soul's act of intelligence needs powers, namely imagination and sense which operate through corporeal organs, this by itself shows that the soul is naturally united to the body in order to complete the human species'.<sup>40</sup>

This disjunction between the rational soul and corporeal matter (together with those powers of the soul which work thereby) must be borne in mind for our discussion of

37. S.C.G. II, 60, pp. 152 ff..

38. Ibid, pp. 151 ff..

39. S.C.G. II, 69, p. 176; cf. 60, pp. 152 ff.

40. S.C.G. II, 68, p. 174.

Thomist ethics in which it is emphasized that reason is the rule and measure of human behaviour. In his discussion of the nature of the rational soul Thomas puts it thus: 'the first mover in man is the intellect, for the intellect by its intelligible object moves the will.'<sup>41</sup> Since the will, too, can extend its operations to universals it must belong to the 'intellective part' of man.<sup>42</sup> In his discussion of the rational nature Thomas was seeking to defend the immortality of the individual soul against the Averroists whose influence he will have encountered while he was teaching and studying in Paris.<sup>43</sup> While he maintained that the soul was indivisibly united with a particular body,<sup>44</sup> then, he also insisted that it was not wholly encompassed by and merged in matter.<sup>45</sup> However, we are interested in this view of the soul because it will influence his evaluation of those powers of the soul which do operate through man's bodily organs. One of those powers is the 'concupiscible appetite'.

This appetite is one of the two which originate in the sensitive soul of man. The other is the 'trascible'

41. S.C.G. II, 60, p. 152.

42. Ibid, p. 153.

43. v. S.C.G. II, 79-81, pp. 220-232.

44. S.C.G. II, 59-61, pp. 146-161; 73, pp. 182-194.

45. S.C.G. II, 68, p. 174.

appetite which enables man to overcome difficulties for the sake of a greater good.<sup>46</sup> The object of the concupiscible appetite, the goal at which it aims, is 'sensual pleasure'.<sup>47</sup> Thomas tells us that 'since pleasure results from a natural operation, it is so much the greater according as it results from a more natural operation. Now to animals the most natural operations are those which preserve the nature of the individual by means of meat and drink, and the nature of the species by the union of the sexes.' The sensitive appetite, in virtue of which man belongs to the genus of animals, is therefore primarily concerned with pleasures of food, drink, and venery. Since these pleasures result from the 'sense of touch', Thomas claims this passion of the soul is essentially concerned with pleasures of touch.<sup>48</sup>

The 'sensual urge', then, is a basic part of man.

It is one of those sensitive and appetitive powers which belong to his animal nature. However, it is quite separate from those powers of intellect which confer distinction upon him. Considered in themselves, therefore, the passions of the sensitive appetite are not competent to be the subject of virtue.<sup>49</sup>

46. S.T. I-II, xxiii, 1, 2; cf. lx, 4; II-II, cxli, 3.

47. e.g. S.T. I, xvi, 2, ad 3.

48. S.T. II-II, cxli, 4.

49. S.T. I-II, lvi, 4.

They 'are common to us and dumb animals'.<sup>50</sup> We should observe that Thomas does not regard this as a matter of evil necessity. Man had 'feelings of soul', which are 'located in the sensual urge' in the state of innocence.<sup>51</sup> Thus Thomas avoids the Platonic disparagement of the body. We must nevertheless ask whether his analysis of the parts of the soul does justice to the unity of human being.<sup>52</sup> Does the factor of rationality transform the sensitive appetite of man or not? Thomas argues vigorously against Plato's conception of the relationship between soul and body. Since Plato makes an essential distinction between the two, he cannot explain the unity of man's being. For 'if the soul be united to the body merely as its mover, the body will indeed be moved by the soul, but will not have being through it'.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the Platonic hypothesis requires that more than one soul be attributed to man. On the one hand there is the intellectual soul which moves the body and on the other the sensitive soul in virtue of which the body can be moved.<sup>54</sup> Now, if 'it follows that all the soul's actions which are in us, proceed from one soul' which is intellective, this should mean

50. Ibid, ad 1.

51. S.T. I, xcv, 3.

52. In addition to the rational and sensitive parts of the soul there is a nutritive part which enables organic bodies to maintain their existence.

53. S.C.G. II, 57, p. 140.

54. S.C.G. II, 58, pp. 142 ff..



that the sensitive part of the soul of man differs from the sensitive soul in an animal. For the latter does not possess a rational soul. Thomas seems to acknowledge this difference when he replies to those who argue for the transmission of the soul through 'a virtue in the semen' that 'the sensitive soul in the dumb animal has no more than the sensitive faculty, and consequently neither its being nor its operation is raised above the body; and so it must needs be generated together with the body, and perish when the body perishes. On the other hand, the sensitive soul in a man, though having besides the sensitive nature an intellective power in consequence of which it follows that it is raised above the body both in being and in operation, is neither generated through the generation of the body, nor perishes through the body's corruption'. Although he goes on to stress that 'the different manner of origin in the aforesaid souls is not on the part of the sensitive faculty whence the generic nature is taken, but on the part of the intellective faculty, whence the specific difference is derived', and that difference of origin therefore entails a specific, not a generic, difference between man and animal,<sup>55</sup> it is nevertheless clear that the sensitive soul of a man has a different origin and mode of

55. S.C.G. II, 89, pp. 268f..

greatest of the Minnesänger,<sup>104</sup> reveals a freedom in dealing with the troubadour theme which, though the German poets are generally less 'submissive' than their predecessors in southern France, few of his compatriots can match.

Love is joy in two hearts closely mated;

If they share alike, that is love's way.

But if two hearts do not share it,

'Tis too burdensome a weight for one alone.

Lady mine, wilt thou not help me then to bear it?<sup>105</sup>

The note of radical submission, and so of suffering, is skilfully retained in the final verse. But does that not suggest that, according to Walther's reckoning, the troubadours know nothing of the love which he began by describing?

While de Rougemont would have us ignore the notions that the lady, as well as love itself, is the source of love's suffering and that the suffering is but one aspect of present, 'worldly' joy, in order to sustain his theory of the demonic basis of passion, Spitzer would have us recognize the profoundly Augustinian note of rejoicing in suffering. When the latter suggests, however, that troubadours such as Jaufré Rudel have transferred an orthodox theological theme to the secular plane, he goes beyond the evidence.<sup>106</sup>

104. e.g. F. Heer, op. cit., p. 153, cf. M.F. Richey, op. cit., p. 20.

105. Walther von der Vogelweide, *Saget mir iemen, waz ist minne*, str. 2, vv. 10-14.

106. L. Spitzer, op. cit., pp. 1f. et passim.

Nevertheless, his thesis does remind us that the 'élan religieux' of an epoch which produced the Crusades, a Bernard of Clairvaux, and a Robert d'Arbrissel,<sup>107</sup> could well find expression in notions such as the one we have been considering.

This may help to explain the 'shadowy' character of the concept of joy in the courtly system. Explanations, specific renderings, were not necessary. Even if an audience which consisted of the medieval aristocracy would have readily comprehended the paradoxical character of love's joy, however, it is worth noting that joy is invariably an elusive concept. In most 'systems' of thought its function is to lend significance to ideas or factors which occur in conjunction with it, rather than to bear its own, self-contained significance. This implies that it confirms the worth of the lady since, especially for the lyric poets, she is the source of joy, and that it provides the incentive to enter into a relationship of courtly love. In other words, elements in the courtly life, such as the lover's service to his lady and the rewards to which this service entitles him, derive their value from the joy which is promised to those who love well.

The extent to which joy involved physical delight was a matter of some dispute. At one extreme we find Jaufré Rudel,

107. R. Bezzola, op. cit., Deuxième Partie, pp. 469ff..

being from that of any other animal. This conclusion is not contradicted by the fact that Thomas has already argued that, since 'the operation of the nutritive and sensitive soul cannot be without the body', they 'are generated through the generation of the body'.<sup>56</sup> For Thomas goes on to say that the generation of man is the combination of a series of generations because 'the ultimate form is reached by degrees'. After the embryo has developed 'a more perfect soul which is both nutritive and sensitive, and then ... lives an animal life ... ; this is corrupted (and) is succeeded by the rational soul introduced from without ...'.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless Thomas refuses to allow that the rationality of the human soul produces a different form of sensitivity. He emphasizes that the difference between man and other animals is specific and not generic. It derives from his intellect and not from a different 'material principle' or 'sensitive nature'.<sup>58</sup> What makes man's sensitive appetite distinctively human is not that it acquires new significance in itself but that it 'has an inborn aptitude to be moved by the rational appetite, as

56. S.C.G. II, 86, pp. 254f..

57. S.C.G. II, 89, pp. 267f..

58. S.C.G. II, 95, p. 287.

stated in *De Anima* iii',<sup>59</sup> (a work of Aristotle). The irascible and concupiscible powers 'can be considered as participating in the reason, from the fact that they have a natural aptitude to obey reason'.<sup>60</sup> Finally, then, there is scarcely any difference between the sensitive nature of a man and that of an animal. For even in the latter we find, 'to a certain extent, ... the existence of habits' which arise when 'by man's reason brutes are disposed by a sort of custom to do things in this way or that way'.<sup>61</sup>

Thomas was therefore convinced that the sensitive appetite serves the same purpose in man as in animals, namely, preservation of the individual and of the species. These are the ends of desire for food and drink on the one hand and for sexual intercourse on the other.<sup>62</sup> Hence Ulpian was correct when he stated that natural law is 'what nature teaches all animals' but it would also be true to say that it consists of the goods which the practical reason discovers when it reflects on nature.<sup>63</sup> All substances seek their own preservation and man does so by means of food

59. S.T. I-II, 1, 3, ad 3.

60. S.T. I-II, lvi, 4.

61. S.T. I-II, 1, 3, ad 2.

62. S.T. II-II, cxli, 4; cf. I-II, xciv, 2; I, xcvi, 1.

63. S.T. I-II, xciv, 2.

and drink. All species seek their own preservation and man does so by means of 'the coupling of male and female, the bringing up of the young, and so forth.'<sup>64</sup> If things lacked the power to survive, the intention of nature would be frustrated. 'And so because nothing is perpetual and everlasting among perishable things except the species, the good of the species is nature's primary interest, and to its maintenance natural procreation is geared.' Moreover, procreation increases the number of individuals, and so contributes to the good of man by fulfilling the command of the 'Author of nature' who 'is interested in a multitude of individuals for their own sake'.<sup>65</sup> The purpose of the sexual appetite, then, is to maintain and extend the life of the species.

We are already in a position to discern an important effect of making reason the principal means of comprehending human nature and organizing human behaviour. Reason prevents us from understanding the sensitive powers 'in themselves'. It represents them; they do not represent themselves. If it should be asked how they could possibly 'represent themselves', we must point out that the question presupposes the very

64. Ibid.

65. S.T. I, xcvi, 1 (referring to Genesis 1 : 28).

manner of thinking that we are criticizing. As Ebeling points out, Thomas considered that the 'word' was simply a function of reason.<sup>66</sup> The theological foundation of this conception is nothing but a rationalistic interpretation of the Biblical account of man's creation in the image of God. Scripture informs us that there is an image of God in man<sup>67</sup> and this close likeness must be conceived 'in terms of the ultimate divergence'. Since the distinctive thing about man is his intellectual nature 'it is clear that only intelligent creatures are properly speaking after God's image.'<sup>68</sup> This conclusion need not be based on an Aristotelian interpretation of divine revelation. It can be drawn simply from a rationalistic conception of 'the word'. If the intellect proves that man is made in the image of God, so, too, does human speech. In common with the Triune God 'the rational creature also exhibits a word procession as regards the intelligence and a love procession as regards the will'.<sup>69</sup> This interpretation of the imago Dei presupposes a rationalistic conception of the Word which forms one of

66. G. Ebeling, 'Reflexions on the Doctrine of Law', in Word And Faith, S.C.M., 1963, pp. 256, 258. As Ebeling puts it, Thomas understood 'the event of proclamation' to be preparatory instruction in the written law which the Holy Spirit will by grace infuse in the believer.

67. S.T. I, xciii, 1.

68. Ibid, art. 2.

69. Ibid, art. 6.

the persons of the Trinity.

If the only valid speech is that which proceeds from an intellect which must either dominate the body or forfeit its 'end and ultimate perfection', which 'is to soar above the whole order of creatures and to reach the First Principle, which is God',<sup>70</sup> then the rest of creation cannot be intelligible in itself. In view of the anarchic origins of medieval society we can hardly be surprised that few medieval thinkers attempted to discover order in the non-rational spheres of life. Hence Roger Bacon and Nicholas of Cusa were voices in a scientific wilderness.<sup>71</sup> Medieval art, from poetry to landscaping reflects the conviction that 'nature' is only profitable to man in so far as his reason can impose order upon it.<sup>72</sup> Thomas shared this point of view. Hence he stated that sexual intercourse which was not aimed at procreation was 'inordinate and sinful'.<sup>73</sup> He also argued that sexual intercourse will not contribute to the pleasure which man will enjoy after the resurrection because 'life after the resurrection will be better ordered than the present life'.

70. S.C.G. II, 87, p. 259.

71. cf. G.G. Coulton, *op. cit.*, p. 432, cf. pp. 111f..

72. cf. *Ibid*, pp. 104ff..

73. S.C.G. IV, 83, p. 286 (*my italics*).



Since the purpose of venery is procreation rather than pleasure, we should not expect this 'secondary' matter<sup>74</sup> to remain when the primary has passed away.<sup>75</sup> While the medieval situation helps to explain and, perhaps, to excuse the Thomist pattern of thought, the latter can hardly be maintained in a scientific age which has learned that the para-rational realms of being are not devoid of order. If an increase in the power of human reason enabled Thomas to attack the dualism of Platonic thought<sup>76</sup> an awareness of the limits of 'pure' reason has placed us in a position to bring a similar charge against Thomism. It fails to do justice to the reality which we apprehend as 'the world'. The 'word' with which it attempts to describe this world is deficient. The sexual appetite of man implies operations which are just as essential as those bare, impersonal ones that the reason of Thomas discerned.

Nevertheless, we should give Thomas credit for his attempt to improve upon the Platonic view of the world. This departure from theological tradition enabled him to take a more favourable attitude to worldly pleasure. Not only does he point out that 'all the pleasurable objects that are at

74. S.T. II-II, cxli, 5.

75. S.C.G. IV, 83, pp. 286-7f.

76. S.C.G. II, 57-58, pp. 138-146.

man's disposal, are directed to some necessity of this life',<sup>77</sup>

but he emphasizes the value of this fortunate conjunction.

'Nature has made them pleasant, lest man should not take the trouble to perform acts that are necessary to nature, and that might happen unless the pleasure urged him'.<sup>78</sup> A

rationalistic and unsympathetic justification of the para-rational world this may be, but an approval of pleasure was something of a theological novelty.

The emphasis which Thomas places on the role of the sexual appetite in the preservation of the species does not indicate that he appreciated the inter-personal dimension of human sexuality. On the contrary, it tends to destroy the possibility of discerning this dimension. In matters 'which chiefly regard the preservation of human life either in the species or in the individual', he writes, 'certain things are to be considered as principal and others as secondary.

The principal thing is the use itself of the necessary means,

77. S.T. II-II, cxli, 6.

78. S.C.G. IV, 83, pp. 286f.. In The Complaint of Nature the twelfth-century poet Alain de Lille bemoans the fact that man prefers 'the craft of magic Venus' to 'the decrees of Nature' (Metre I). With the cult of courtly love in mind the poet causes Nature to complain that man 'tries to overthrow the natural impulses of nature, and arms against me the violence of wicked lust ... Man alone rejects the music of my harp, and raves under the lyre of frenzied Orpheus' (Prose IV). v. The Complaint of Nature by Alain de Lille, trans. by D.M. Moffat, Yale Studies in English xxxvi, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1908, pp. 3, 35f..

of the woman who is necessary for the preservation of the species.<sup>79</sup> Given the premiss concerning the function of the sexual appetite, the conclusion follows inevitably. However, we might doubt whether human sexuality serves but a single purpose. Thomas was inclined to think that it did because of his passion for order. If a particular activity such as sexual intercourse, or a principle of action such as the sexual appetite, served a multiple purpose, the analysis of human behaviour might become confused and, what is more important, it would become difficult to fix moral priorities. In other words, standards of behaviour would be jeopardized and the human situation might lapse into anarchy. For moral decision would become the responsibility of the individual in the situation. He would have to face the uncertainty alone and, in it and because of it, decide for himself. Thus another aspect of the Thomist concern for order comes to light. Order is a social, as well as a rational principle. It ensures that society functions smoothly. It may lessen individual responsibility but the medieval 'socialist' was more concerned about the threat of anarchy. However his brand of socialism could not endure for ever because he failed to recognize that the church, which he expected to be

79. S.T. II-II, cxli, 5.

one of the agents of order, possessed a Gospel which challenged the individual to take the responsibility of living by faith in God, not by conformity to a set of laws.

Although Thomas was prepared to tolerate sexual pleasure, he did not consider that it was designed to cement the personal relation of husband and wife. He regarded pleasure as a corollary of natural operations<sup>80</sup> and, for this reason, it had to be conceived in individualistic terms. It is a product of the individual appetite's quest for apprehended goods which, in this case, are 'sensible and bodily'.<sup>81</sup> In that case virtue, too, will be a matter which concerns the individual alone. Thus Thomas states that the value of operations which satisfy the desires of the individual depends 'only on commensuration with the agent', that is to say 'on the way in which man is affected to them. And for this reason in suchlike operations virtue must needs be chiefly about internal emotions which are called the passions of the soul, as is evidently the case with temperance, fortitude and the like'. In other words, Thomas contends that the virtue of justice is of little relevance to sexual

80. S.C.G. IV, 83, pp. 286f.; S.T. II-II, cxli, 6.

81. S.T. II-II, cxli, 3.

behaviour. The sexual agent is not required to be 'commensurate with someone else'. He can evaluate the actions which spring from his sexual appetite without considering whether 'there is an element of something due or undue to another'.<sup>82</sup> In sexual matters, then, a person should consult his own interests rather than those of his partner. He must ensure that the pleasure which he derives from the satisfaction of sexual desire is temperate but he cannot assume responsibility for the 'internal emotions' of another.

The account which Thomas gave of the relation between the sexes will shortly occupy our attention. However, we should first take the opportunity of comparing his views on sexuality with those of his theological predecessors. Although he thought that reason provided the clue to the destiny of man, he did manage to take a more positive view of other aspects of human nature than we have found in most of the theologians who preceded him. Anselm had adopted a comparatively lenient attitude to sexuality but he did little to justify it. Thomas was able to do so because he possessed the works of Aristotle. While Aristotle alone could have

82. S.T. I-II, lx, 2.

taught him that 'nothing in the things of nature is void of purpose',<sup>83</sup> however, this axiom was also implicit in his conception of the creative activity of God. Aristotelian metaphysics may have assisted his comprehension of God's creative activity but the latter was the basis on which he established the goodness of creation. In Holy Writ, he tells us, 'we are clearly given to understand that the corporeal and visible creatures were made because it is good for them to be, and this is in keeping with the divine goodness.'<sup>84</sup> He could then employ Aristotelian principles in order to explain the goodness of nature. In his works we find extensive discussions of the order of creation and this in itself is significant. Earlier theologians rarely adverted to man's pristine state unless they wished to emphasize the depth to which he had fallen. This emphasis persists in the work of Hugh St. Victor, even though his systematic approach to theology had led to a fuller exposition of God's original work.

Although theologians had been known to question the goodness of the sexual division of mankind, none had

83. S.C.G. II, 22, p. 37.

84. S.C.G. II, 44, p. 105.

seriously doubted the wisdom of God's original creation. Owing to the influence of Augustine and the ascetic movement, however, most of them thought that sin had so infected human nature as to make it advisable, if not necessary, for the Christian to flee the tempting goods of this life. Sexual activity was, of course, considered to be one of the most basic of such 'goods'. Aristotle provided Thomas with a framework in which he could develop a more consistent view of the goodness of creation. If God is the 'Author of nature',<sup>85</sup> then it is not in man's power, by sin or any other means, to destroy its basic principles.<sup>86</sup>

We shall shortly discover that Thomas was loath to reject Augustine's account of original sin. Nevertheless there are marked differences in the appraisals which these two theologians made of sexual activity. Their views on pleasure, for example, have little in common. Thomas considered that sexual pleasure was not only legitimate but advantageous. Without it man might overlook his responsibility to produce and rear children, to maintain the life of the species. As Thomas himself noted, Augustine allowed that man might have enjoyed an 'ordered'

85. S.T. I, xcvi, 1.

86. S.T. I-II, lxxxv, 1, 2.

pleasure in the state of innocence.<sup>87</sup> However, he also insisted that pleasure had since become a form of bondage to a fallen world. Thus he admitted that it could be 'honourable' in certain circumstances<sup>88</sup> but he denied that sexual pleasure could be good because he was convinced that it was nothing but the indulgence of an overweening concupiscence.<sup>89</sup> In particular, Augustine denied that pleasure had a positive role to play in connection with this necessary activity of man. The seminal elements 'do not receive their existence from the libidinous pleasure, but are excited and emitted in company with it.'<sup>90</sup> Augustine may have found it difficult to harmonize the Platonic denigration of matter with the Biblical account of creation, but the doctrine of original sin provided him with a means of introducing the former pattern of thought. Thomas remained faithful to Aristotle and exhibited no tendency to reject the implications of sexual existence altogether.<sup>91</sup>

87. S.T. I, xcv, 2; xcvi, 2.

88. Augustine, *De Nupt. et Conc.*, II, xxii.

89. *Ibid.*, II, xxx.

90. *Ibid.*, II, xxvi.

91. Although Augustine did not attempt to outlaw sexual activity, the influence which neo-Platonism exerted upon this aspect of his thought is unmistakeable.



A greater appreciation of the principles of human existence is also apparent in Thomas' discussion of human virtue. Augustine was inclined to think that talk of virtue in unbelievers was meaningless.<sup>92</sup> Thomas rejects this extreme view. Not only does he commend the virtues of social life but he enunciates the famous principle of natural law whereby all rational creatures 'join in and make their own the Eternal Reason through which they have their natural aptitudes for their due activity and purpose.'<sup>93</sup> Hence human laws have a genuine educative purpose and value.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, we must beware of exaggerating the difference between Thomas and Augustine. Although Thomas states that man 'is directed to his connatural end, by means of his natural principles', he qualifies this remark by adding that man cannot arrive at his goal without the Divine assistance.<sup>95</sup> Since God has created man for a supernatural end which will only be reached by those who have received an infusion of divine grace and a share of the theological virtues, the true and perfect character of virtue depends upon the

92. e.g. op. cit, I, iv.

93. S.T. I-II, xci, 2.

94. S.T. I-II, xcv, 1.

95. S.T. I-II, lxii, 1.

presence of charity. For this supreme theological virtue directs man to his ultimate goal.<sup>96</sup> Hence prudence, 'that counsels, judges, and commands in those things that are directed to the end', and without which there can be no moral virtue,<sup>97</sup> only directs man aright when it is 'well disposed towards his ultimate end'.<sup>98</sup> By means of this distinction between natural and perfect virtue Thomas is able to claim that his views agree with those of Augustine.<sup>99</sup> A measure of their difference, however, is the theoretical justification which Thomas provides for the seemingly contradictory attitude of the medieval Church to unbelief and to heresy. The unbeliever was considered to be en route from lesser to perfect virtue.<sup>100</sup> The heretic, on the other hand, had denied the Faith and so cut himself off from God by mortal sin.<sup>101</sup> There was no virtue in him since one could not serve a God whom one had rejected.

By affirming the validity of the virtues of social life Thomas reverses the monastic tendency to identify Christian existence with the ascetic virtues. 'All the moral virtues are infused together with charity' since 'God operates no less perfectly in works of grace than in works of nature'.

96. S.T. I-II, lxii, 4; cf. lxv, 3.

97. S.T. I-II, lxv, 1.

98. S.T. I-II, lxv, 2.

99. Ibid.

100. S.T. II-II, x, 8, cf. 1; 6.

101. S.T. II-II, v, 3; cf. S.C.G. III, 118, pp. 100f..

If, by nature, man possesses 'a principle of certain works' as well as the means for their execution, how much more will these be provided by grace.<sup>102</sup> Thus the radical individualism of monastic theology is checked. Although his rationalism leads to a conception of man's ultimate end which is as individualistic as that of Augustine,<sup>103</sup> Thomas does recognize one form of inter-personal responsibility. Man must cultivate the virtues which maintain the social order. Thus justice is 'the most excellent of the moral virtues' because it sets man in order 'not only in himself, but also in regard to another'.<sup>104</sup> Elsewhere he states that a rational being is able to 'know truths about God and about living in society. Correspondingly whatever this involves is a matter of natural law, for instance that a man should shun ignorance, not offend others with whom he should live in civility, and other such related requirements'.<sup>105</sup> To us all this may seem rather pedestrian and even bourgeois. However it does represent a theological affirmation of goals which were vital to the social enterprise of the Middle Ages.

The value which Thomas ascribes to social order does not conflict with the individualism which pervades his

102. S.T. I-II, lxv, 3.

103. v. inf. pp. 545-547

104. S.T. I-II, lxvi, 4.

105. S.T. I-II, xciv, 2.

theory of sexuality because both facets of his thought are determined by his rationalism. He not only places reason in control of the sexual appetite of the individual but he interprets rational control in static terms. The orders of creation and of virtue are conceived to have been established once for all. The scholastic mind could appreciate the Biblical notion of the chaos which threatens to undermine the creation but it failed to appreciate the dynamics of God's creative activity and therefore attempted to discover stable effects of the divine action. When these effects were identified with the metaphysical principles of Aristotle undue emphasis came to be placed on man's responsibility to order his life according to the principles of his own existence.<sup>106</sup> The extent to which his potential for good or evil is defined from without himself was thus overlooked. Sexual irresponsibility on the part of one's neighbours is as real a threat to one's own responsibility as failure to order one's own desires. Similarly, the latter failure is irresponsible because it threatens the integrity of others as well as one's own.

Thomas did of course insist that the virtues (and the vices) are related to one another but the manner in which

106. In other words, Thomas recognized, but exaggerated, the contribution which the individual could make to social order.

he portrayed their connection betrays their essentially independent status. One may lead to another either accidentally or formally. Thus covetousness may give rise to pride<sup>107</sup> or theft may be pursued for the sake of adultery.<sup>108</sup> They may also be connected by a principle of behaviour common to each. Thus prudence is the common factor in all the moral virtues.<sup>109</sup> However, each has its proper object which determines its specific character and thus sets it apart from the rest. Theological tradition may have encouraged Thomas to overlook the interpersonal character of sexuality but his own conception of virtue led him to equate sexual goodness with restraint and to ignore the claims of the neighbour. Even if we grant that the ultimate goal of sexuality is the preservation of the species,<sup>110</sup> a view which also betrays the impersonal and monistic character of his rationalism, it does not follow that the means of

107. S.T. I-II, lxxxiv, 2.

108. S.T. I-II, xviii, 7. In this case 'a moral act (comes) under two disparate species' because the objects or ends remain essentially separate. Although this analysis does help to clarify the seductive power of vice over the individual, it also reveals the limitations of the Thomist conception of moral action. Neither the variety of factual considerations which a moral agent must take into account nor the mixture of motives which may determine his decision is recognized. Thus the complexity of the moral situation is ignored and an unfounded confidence in the competence of the moral agent is assured.

109. S.T. I-II, lviii, 4.

110. S.T. I-II, xci, 6, ad 3; cf. xciv, 3, ad 1.

achieving this end must be impersonal. Thomas only reached this conclusion because of the reliance which he placed upon human reason. He did not believe that order could be achieved in the sexual realm unless reason managed to dominate the sensitive appetite.

In spite of our criticism, we must acknowledge that the theology of Thomas improves upon a number of traditional conceptions. In particular it recognizes that the goals and delights of mundane existence can be legitimate and, thus challenges the excesses of an ascetic theology which had turned its back on the world. Although the interest which Thomas takes in the social order has its limitations, it, too, helps to correct an imbalance from which theology had long suffered. These aspects of his thought will exert a favourable influence upon his ethical views, but we shall discover that the more he deals with concrete problems of existence, the less novel his thought appears. This phenomenon is due in part to the heteronomous role that he assigns to reason. However, it is also a product of his respect for authority. The deference which he pays to the canon law and the Fathers tends to prevent his new principles from producing new ethical conclusions. The conservative elements in his thought certainly dictate much of what he has to say about the sexual division of mankind.

## B. The Thomist view of the sexes.

We have observed that Thomas regarded woman as a being 'who is necessary for the preservation of the species'.<sup>111</sup> In the Summa Theologica he devotes a whole question to the wisdom of the divine creation of woman and his answer depends almost entirely upon her contribution to the preservation of the species (which of course, includes nurture of the children that she has borne).<sup>112</sup> We must not attach too much significance to the fact that Thomas raises the question. Many of the scholastic 'questions' were derived from theological tradition and we have discovered that this particular question had a long history.

Thomas strongly defends the goodness of God's creation. Whereas some theologians had maintained that the Biblical writer saw reason to omit the pronouncement of divine approval from his account of the creation of the sexes,<sup>113</sup> Thomas emphasizes that the goodness of the entire creation is affirmed. With some exegetical laxity, he proceeds to state that this affirmation is made after each set of created things has been pronounced good.<sup>114</sup> He also insists that woman is not a derivation of man but the product of a divine

111. v. sup. pp. 446f..

112. S.T. I, xcii, 1.

113. v. Genesis 1 : 31.

114. S.C.G. II, 45, p. 108.

act of creation. For 'only God who is the founder of nature can bring things into being apart from the natural process and due order.'<sup>115</sup>

Why, then, was woman created? Thomas tells us that it was 'as a help for man; not indeed to help him in any other work, as some have maintained, because where most work is concerned man can get help more conveniently from another man than from a woman; but to help him in the work of procreation.'<sup>116</sup> This statement introduces his discussion of the first article of this question and thus establishes his basic conception of woman. If woman's role is so limited, however, why did God bother to endow her with all the attributes of human being? Thomas seeks to avoid the awkward implication of this question by appealing to 'the procreative pattern in living things.' At the bottom of the scale are those 'which have no procreative power themselves', at the top, man, whose function is nobler than that of the perfect animals 'which have the active power of procreation in the male sex and the passive in the female.' Man's function is 'that of understanding things. And so there was more reason than ever in man for emphasising the distinction between the sexes.' Nevertheless, we may still suspect that

115. S.T. I, xcii, 4.

116. S.T. I, xcii, 1.



woman was not made for maternity alone. Hence Thomas concludes his argument with a piece of exegetical opportunism which is typical of medieval scholarship. He notes that 'immediately after the formation of the woman it goes on to say, They shall be two in one flesh.' Thus God was presumed to have specified her principal function.<sup>117</sup>

The role which Thomas assigns to woman plainly contradicts what he elsewhere has to say about the superiority of the rational soul. He never goes so far as to deny that woman participates in reason. Indeed, her rationality is implicitly recognized in such statements as 'the power of rational discernment is by nature stronger in man.'<sup>118</sup> If woman possesses a measure of reason, if she is a member of the human species, then the proper character of her existence must be to join with man and act according to reason and not according to her sexual nature alone. It cannot be argued that we must look for a specific difference between man and woman since that would involve a denial of her (or his!) membership in the rational creation. Nor can the heteronomous authority of male reason validly consign woman to a life of child-bearing. For Thomas himself admitted

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid., ad 2.

that the male has as much to contribute to procreation and the nurture of children as the female.<sup>119</sup> Thus it is evident that Thomas has allowed the general principles of his thought to be subverted in order that he might arrive at the conclusions he desired. This is not a procedure which the pure rationalist or the true theologian would adopt. It indicates that part of Thomas' concern was to maintain such order as society already exhibited. For the church had begun to stake its authority on the preservation of that order. The conservatism of Aristotle, who thought that virtue was something to be achieved by emulating the actions of the virtuous<sup>120</sup> and by obeying the laws 'for their own sakes',<sup>121</sup> is reinforced by means of an appeal to the authority of an institution which has a vested interest in the established order. Those who would excuse the Thomist conception of woman on the ground of its adaptation to medieval conditions fail to appreciate the ambiguity of such a defence. For ecclesiastical authorities, including the theologians, must bear at least part of the blame for the fact that medieval woman was unable to improve her social status.

119. cf. e.g. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 5; xcii, 1; S.C.G. II, 89, pp. 266f.; S.T. II-II, cliv, 2; S.C.G. III, 122, p. 115.

120. Sir David Ross (trans.), The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, O.U.P., 1954 (The World's Classics), II, 4, pp. 34f. (1105a 17ff).

121. Ibid, x, 9, pp. 269ff. (1179a 35ff.).

Thomas defined the role of woman in terms which were less generous than those which a number of medieval theologians employed. He agreed with Hugh of St. Victor that the Biblical account of her creation was an allegory of her relation to man. She was formed from man's rib, he stated, 'in order to signify the companionship there should be between man and woman'. In contrast with Hugh, however, Thomas did not stress that sexual companionship should be animated by love. He was content to say that woman was created in a manner which indicated that she should neither exercise authority over man nor be 'merely his slave'.<sup>122</sup> Thus Thomas left himself free to demand that woman should live in a condition which bordered upon slavery. He could not deny that she belonged to the rational creation but he managed to deprive her of most of the privileges which he ascribed to rationality. She was not permitted to concern herself with matters which arose outside the home and she was even expected to defer to her husband in regard to domestic affairs. 'For the female requires the male ... for governance: because the male excels both in intelligence and strength.'<sup>123</sup> From this remark we may infer that Thomas upheld a husband's right to use physical, as well as intellectual, power in

122. S.T. I, xcii, 3.

123. S.C.G. III, 123, p. 115.

order to 'govern' his wife. There is certainly no evidence to the contrary.

Thomas did not determine the status of woman on the basis of her inferior wisdom and might alone. He also appealed to 'the teaching of philosophers that the active causality in generation is from the father, the mother merely providing material.'<sup>124</sup> This doctrine, to which he refers on a number of occasions,<sup>125</sup> provides an indication of the obstacles which scholasticism placed in the path of scientific discovery.<sup>126</sup> Roger Bacon was a severe critic of the esteem in which the schoolmen held classical thinkers.<sup>127</sup> According to this biological principle, then, the male plays the creative part in the very activity which corresponds to the proper function of the female. The implications of this doctrine only serve to reinforce the mean condition of the medieval woman.

At first sight this principle of classical biology seems to imply that the woman is not entitled to derive much pleasure from sexual activity. For the scholastic mind would have noted a connection between the notions of passivity (receptivity) and suffering (change).<sup>128</sup> Although suffering

124. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 5.

125. e.g. S.T. I-II, xcii, 1; S.C.G. II, 89, pp. 266f.

126. cf. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., pp. 433ff..

127. Ibid, p. 434.

128. S.C.G. II, 56, pp. 135f..

did not imply the presence of pain, it did imply an absence of movement within the subject. Since pleasure presupposes activity, then, the man, who is 'the active causality', will enjoy most of the pleasure that is derived from sexual activity. We must not exaggerate the significance of this argument because Thomas was primarily concerned with the biology of reproduction,<sup>129</sup> and he did admit that the female was set in motion by the male agent.<sup>130</sup> We cannot identify his views on sexual intercourse with those of our Victorian ancestors. Nevertheless, medieval puritanism was no mean force and it is persistently overlooked by scholars who want to romanticize the history of the Middle Ages.<sup>131</sup> Thomas may have considered that pleasure was a legitimate product of sexual activity but he never suggested that it added to the value of such activity.<sup>132</sup>

Thomist biology also degrades woman because it introduces the notion that the proper product of procreation is male. Thomas accepts the Aristotelian account of causality. The formal cause of anything not only determines its specific character but establishes the principle

129. e.g. S.C.G. II, 89, pp. 266f..

130. cf. S.C.G. III, 156, p. 154. Virgins 'are said to be like angels' because of their abstinence from 'sexual emotions'. However, it is noteworthy that Thomas speaks almost entirely of Male virginity.

131. cf. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., e.g. pp. 180f..

132. v. S.C.G. IV, 83, pp. 286f, etc.

according to which it operates.<sup>133</sup> In man this principle is the rational soul which is imparted directly by God. Since the male is the agent of procreation, however, Thomas contends that 'the active power in the seed ... tends to produce something like itself, perfect in masculinity'. The birth of a female is due either to some fault in one of the parents or to a malevolent influence 'like the south wind ... which is damp as we are told by Aristotle'.<sup>134</sup> Although Thomas admits that 'the weakness of the female sex ... (is) intended by nature' and will be preserved in the resurrection,<sup>135</sup> then, he considers that the female is a deficient form of human being. Hence he could assert that she will occupy an inferior place in heaven. On earth she has no right to possessions, which 'are directed to the preservation of the natural life', because the son carries on the natural life of the father and is thus naturally fitted to 'succeed in things belonging to the father'.<sup>136</sup> Thus her subjection to the male was complete; even her son was her potential lord. An inferior place in heaven could not be as bad as her worldly situation! For this reason Western woman

133. e.g. S.C.G., II, 46, p. 110.

134. S.T. I, xcii, 1, ad 1.

135. S.C.G. IV, 88, p. 301.

136. S.C.G. III, 123, p. 114.

began to take an interest in spiritual affairs which still tends to exceed that of her male counterpart.

We have so far concentrated upon the conservative, if not reactionary, elements in the Thomist account of the relation between the sexes. However, we must beware of exaggerating the harshness of his attitude to woman. He does point out that her creation from man 'was good in order to make the man love the woman more and stick to her more inseparably, knowing that she had been brought forth from himself.' The manner in which she was created also proves that Aristotle was correct when he stated that a man and a woman should 'establish a home life' in which, however, they may only 'work together at some things' and the man remains the head.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, the emphasis which Thomas places upon the 'sacramental or typological' value of her creation, which 'stands for the Church taking its origin from Christ',<sup>138</sup> seems to imply that woman possesses a value which he was often reluctant to acknowledge.<sup>139</sup> His conception of marital love contains a severity which we could hardly wish to

137. S.T. I, xcii, 2.

138. Ibid.

139. As Emile Male has pointed out, however, medieval symbolism presupposed a rejection rather than a transformation of the sensible world (v. *The Gothic Image*, trans. by Dora N. Nussey, Fontana, 1961, p. 20). For this reason Thomas could regard woman as a symbol of the church without having to revise his conception of her social status. On the other hand, Hugh of St. Victor considered that the creation of woman was a symbol of the relation which God intended to establish between the sexes. We may therefore presume that Thomas deliberately chose to limit the significance of the creation of woman.

revive, even though it is not devoid of merit. For it is a love which requires a husband to protect his wife but not to devote himself to her total welfare. Moreover, we should not exaggerate the existential import of his sacramental interpretation of the creation of woman. For the scholastic mind was primarily interested in the truth of faith to which the sacramental object pointed. Had greater attention been paid to this object theologians might have noticed that they encouraged husbands to love their wives with a severity which Christ was not presumed to show to the Church. Thus they might have been forced to revise their optimistic view of God's loyalty to the Church as well as their stern attitude to the fair sex. Scholastic theology and ethics would have benefited by a reconsideration of these matters.

It is therefore clear that the principles which Thomas appropriated from Aristotle did less to raise the status of woman than they did to improve man's appreciation of his sexuality. The 'given' order of sexual relations is not challenged. On the contrary, it is strengthened. Thomas therefore saw no reason to question the theological tradition which asserted that woman was responsible for the first act of sin and its deplorable consequences. Thomas introduces this subject during his discussion of the sexual



creation and, since our next task will be to consider his view of original sin, we will conclude our analysis of the relation which he sought between the sexes by examining his account of mankind's lapse into sin.

Thomas maintains that woman (Eve) was the occasion of sin to man (Adam). However, he denies that God, who foreknew what she would do, should have refrained from creating her. The completion of the universe, the general good, and God's capacity to bring good out of evil outweigh this particular evil.<sup>140</sup> Later in the Summa Theologica Thomas expounds his view of 'the first man's sin' more fully. Although the man's sin was more grievous 'because he was more perfect than the woman', the character of the sinner is but a circumstance of sin. The species of the sin 'is more essential ... and ... of greater moment.' Now Thomas assures us that the woman's pride was far worse than the man's because she acted in defiance of the divine will whereas he merely used his own resources in an attempt to prove his likeness to God. She also sinned against the man by inviting him to emulate her action. Although he did so, he can be partly excused because his action was an expression of his good-will toward her.<sup>141</sup>

140. S.T. I, xcii, 1, ad 3.

141. S.T. II-II, clxiii, 4.

The reason for this careful assessment of relative guilt soon becomes apparent. We are informed that 'death, sickness, and all defects of the body are due to the lack of the body's subjection to the soul', a disorder which resulted from the first act of disobedience.<sup>142</sup> How much credence did the common people give to such opinions? Coulton advises us to beware of making facile inferences from the writings of the scholars.<sup>143</sup> This is a fair warning but there is significance in the fact that it is prompted by the following passage in Piers Plowman in which the poet, William Langland, hears 'Lady Study' deriding 'great men' who linger over their meals and debate such questions as:-

"Why would our Saviour suffer such a worm in his bliss,

That beguiled the woman, and the man after ... ?

Why should we, that now live, for the works of Adam

Rot or suffer torment? reason would it never."

Such motives they move, these masters in their glory,

And maken men to disbelieve that muse much on their words.<sup>144</sup>

We do not wish to exaggerate the influence of the worldly 'masters' to whom Langland was referring. We would rather point out that this is not the only passage in which the poet

142. S.T. II-II, clxiv, 1; cf. I-II, lxxxv, 5.

143. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., p. 547.

144. Piers Plowman B, x, 101 quoted in Coulton, op. cit., p. 547.

describes the woman as the first sinner.<sup>145</sup> Hence we would claim that the doctrine of original sin was well known and generally accepted. For disbelief is usually the reward of the few who ponder too much. Coulton himself exaggerates when he states that Langland was prepared to make a lone stand against the disorders of his age and that he thereby gave proof of 'spiritual greatness.'<sup>146</sup> However, it is fair to say that 'the poem of Piers Plowman does very faithfully speak for the man in the street.'<sup>147</sup>

Although Thomas preferred to blame the woman for original sin he had to admit that Adam played the crucial part. Since he is both the original human being and 'the active causality in generation' he is the head of the human family and the source of its unity.<sup>148</sup> His act of disobedience to God therefore plunged the whole of mankind into a condition of sinfulness. In this connection, Thomas states that 'the woman was employed as an instrument of temptation in bringing about the downfall of the man, both because the woman was weaker than the man, and consequently more liable to be deceived, and because, on account of her union with man, the devil was able to deceive the man especially through her.'<sup>149</sup> This argument is hardly calculated to make a man cherish the

145. Piers Plowman B, xviii, 405 quoted in Coulton, op. cit., p. 550.

146. Coulton, op. cit., p. 552.

147. Ibid, p. 547.

148. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 1; cf. 3;4;5; lxxii, 2; 4.

149. S.T. II-II, clxv, 2, ad 1.

proximity of a woman. However, one of the most interesting things about the Thomist analysis of the primal sin is the power which it attributes to the woman. On the one hand, she appears to be the incarnation of radical evil. She not only defied God, but led man captive. On the other hand, she almost ceases to be a moral agent and becomes a mere instrument in the production of sin. Thus she is virtually transformed into a member of the spiritual hierarchy which transcends the moral struggle of mankind. It is therefore evident that Thomas framed his conception of woman in that milieu which encouraged man to worship a lady such as the Rose of the troubadours or the church's Queen of Heaven.

Jarrett correctly points out that the comic literature of the Middle Ages indicates a contrast between the actual role of woman and her theoretical state of subjection.<sup>150</sup> However he fails to appreciate that these comedies satirized the weakness of men who were unable to keep a woman in what was considered to be her proper place. They drew attention to the tactics which a woman had to adopt in order to assert herself. She attempted to overcome her opponents by means of a clever mind and a quick tongue. We may dislike the schemes which she concocted and the constant

150. B. Jarrett, Social Theories of The Middle Ages 1200-1500, Ernest Benn, London, 1926, p. 79.

stream of abuse which issued from her mouth but we can sympathize with her nevertheless. Had she never appeared on the stage of history, the various idealisms of which she was the subject would have made it even more difficult for Western man to treat her as a real human being.

### C. The Thomist view of original sin.

The manner in which Thomas deals with the subject of mankind's separation from God has earned the praise of certain scholars. On the one hand, we are told, he introduced a new clarity into the discussion by insisting that original sin be regarded as a specific kind of sin and not be confused with other types, such as personal sin.<sup>151</sup> It is further claimed that Thomas managed to remove the emphasis which theology had long placed on concupiscence, especially in its sexual form.<sup>152</sup> Although we are chiefly interested in the latter claim, we cannot divorce it entirely from the former since a mere refusal to stress concupiscence in an account of original sin would be insufficient to reverse theological tradition. A coherent and convincing alternative had to be provided.

151. e.g. T.C. O'Brien (ed.) in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 26, Blackfriars, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965, p. xxi.

152. *Ibid.*, e.g. p. 19, note "i".

Thomas argues that the doctrine of original sin points to a reality which must be acknowledged by all Christians. 'It is basic that according to the Catholic Faith we are bound to hold that the first sin of the first man passes to posterity by way of origin.'<sup>153</sup> In the Summa Contra Gentiles the first of the three chapters which are devoted to original sin contains little but the Scriptural evidence for the doctrine.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, Thomas does invite us to 'observe that there are certain probable signs of original sin in the human race.' These include death and the weakness of reason. He admits that 'these defects seem natural to man absolutely, if we consider his nature from its lower (i.e. bodily) side', but he claims that 'if we consider divine providence, and the dignity of the higher part of man's nature (i.e. his rational, immortal soul), it can be proved with sufficient probability that these defects are penal, and consequently that the human race was originally infected with sin.'<sup>155</sup> This statement foreshadows a notable characteristic of Thomas' account of original sin. The existential reality to which the doctrine refers is a state of penalty rather than sin. Its recognition as sin is an inference made by reason in the light of the Church's

153. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 1.

154. S.C.G. IV, 50, pp. 183ff.. Included in the arguments is the purpose of the Church in administering 'baptism to children soon after birth'.

155. S.C.G. IV, 52, pp. 189f..

revealed truth rather than an apprehension of the force of evil under the conditions of existence.

Having established that the doctrine of original sin is part of Catholic truth, Thomas conceives his primary task to be the explanation of its transmission. We have already been informed by William Langland, the author of Piers Plowman, that certain 'masters in their glory' considered this to be the most offensive aspect of the doctrine. However, the procedure which Thomas adopts is due, not to the problems which his contemporaries raised, but to the logical requirements of his conception of sin. He maintains that sin is essentially 'a bad human act', that is to say a voluntary deed which lacks conformity with right reason.<sup>156</sup> The specific kinds of sin, including original sin, all belong to this general type. Their distinctive character is discerned by noting their efficient cause. The cause of original sin, that which establishes it as a particular kind of sin, is the act of generation. Original sin arises 'by way of origin!!' (per originem)<sup>157</sup>. In order to comprehend this kind of sin, then, we must begin with an investigation of the way in which it is transmitted. Thus Thomas bases his discussion of original sin on a uniform concept of sin. He presumes that in the phrases 'original sin' and 'personal sin'

156. S.T. I-II, lxxi, 6.

157. S.T. I-II, lxxi, 1, ad 1.

the common term has a common reference, namely, to a voluntary wrong act. This is the model which enables us to comprehend all forms of sin. From the outset, then, he makes an important break with the teaching of most of his predecessors in Western theology. Even if he were to show that sin can be transmitted from parent to child, he could not allow that it helps to determine the character of human existence.<sup>158</sup> Original sin cannot be identified with concupiscence (or with an unjust will) because there must be a voluntary element in sin. The most Thomas will allow is that existence depends upon factors which dispose, but do not cause, man to sin. Man finds himself in a penal rather than a sinful condition. The source of guilt is the misuse of human responsibility and not the structure of human being. In other words, guilt is not a concomitant of responsibility but a possible consequence of responsibility. It is already evident, then, that Thomas has departed from the Augustinian account of original sin. However, we have yet to discover whether he succeeds in reducing the damage which original sin was believed to have done to human sexuality.

(i) The transmission of original sin.

Since Thomas presumes that sin is a voluntary matter, he has to explain how the term can be applied to a defect

158. Man may of course become 'hardened' in sin. By means of a succession of bad acts, he can create in himself a vicious habit.



which the individual inherits from his parents. He tells us that all previous attempts to describe the transmission of sin break down because they pay little or no attention to this problem. Explanations which rely upon the transmission of the soul or of bodily defects which infect the individual soul<sup>159</sup> 'are inadequate because they rule out culpability.' Thomas endeavours to solve the problem of inherited culpability by means of a suggestion which Anselm had made.<sup>160</sup> 'All who are born of Adam can be considered as one man by reason of sharing the one nature inherited from the first parent.'<sup>161</sup> Through his personal sin Adam forfeited

159. The latter explanation seeks to meet the challenge which the notion of divine creation of each individual soul ('creationism') raises for an account of original sin. Thomas held the 'creationist' view, cf. inf. pp. 479-482.

160. Although Thomas was acquainted with the views which Anselm expressed on original sin (v. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 1, obj. 1), he never acknowledged that he had appropriated some of them. Thus he suggested that his explanation of the transmission of original sin was based on a new approach to the problem (S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 1) and he omitted to mention that Anselm was the first to identify original sin with the privation of original justice (v. S.T. I-II, lxxxii). T.C. O'Brien seems to think that this silence is justified because Anselm's 'ultra-realism on the problem of universals' prevented him from making any contribution to the problem of inherited guilt (v. op. cit., p. 128). Since this argument fails to explain how Thomas could make use of ideas which Anselm had put forward, it must be rejected. I suspect that Thomas was reluctant to identify the source of these ideas because he disapproved of the role which Anselm assigned to the will. Whereas Anselm maintained that justice depended upon the movement of the will, Thomas insisted that reason had to rule the will so that the moral order might be preserved.

161. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 1.

the original justice which God had graciously bestowed upon him.<sup>162</sup> This endowment was not his personal possession. It was granted to human nature which he, 'through a generative impulse', passes on to 'all who descend from him by way of origin.'<sup>163</sup> Hence his loss is the loss of the whole human race. Original sin, therefore, is 'a sin of nature' in which the individual member of the species necessarily participates.<sup>164</sup>

This account of original sin does draw attention to some important aspects of that doctrine. Original sin refers to a universal condition of humanity.<sup>165</sup> It therefore transcends moral categories. It is not something for which an individual can be fairly blamed. For this reason Thomas does not agree with Anselm 'that other men were actually in (Adam).'<sup>166</sup> For that would make all guilty of an actual transgression. Original sin is a peculiar form of evil for another reason. It is 'a sin of nature', and is therefore one and equal in all men.<sup>167</sup> This implies that it underlies human activity and cannot be identified with a specific type of human activity.<sup>168</sup> The traditional

162. S.C.G. IV, 52, pp. 190 ff..  
163. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 1.  
164. S.C.G. IV, 52, pp. 190 ff..  
165. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 3.  
166. S.C.G. IV, 52, p. 192.  
167. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 4.  
168. Nevertheless, Thomas did insist on treating original sin as a particular kind of moral fault. This ambiguity plagues his whole exposition of the doctrine. cf. inf. esp. pp. 480 ff..

equation of original sin and concupiscence is mistaken because it admits of variation in the influence which original sin exerts upon men. Although Thomas maintained that original sin was transmitted by means of procreation, then, he also insisted that this process did not involve 'actual sin, for this depends on the will of the individual, whereas the act of the generative power is not obedient to reason or the will.'<sup>169</sup> In short, it is simply a natural event. Consequently, original sin is transmitted even if there is no concupiscence or actual sin in the sexual act.<sup>170</sup> The statement which David makes in the seventh verse of Psalm 50 'cannot refer to actual sin, seeing that David was conceived and born of lawful wedlock. Therefore his words must refer to original sin.'<sup>171</sup>

We must now ask whether Thomas has managed to improve upon the work of his predecessors by showing how an inherited stain may be regarded as a form of sin. The solution which he offers to this problem depends upon his claim that original sin 'pertains to the whole specific nature' and is 'transmitted from one man to another, even as the specific nature is.'<sup>172</sup> Hence it 'is the sin of the individual person only because he

169. S.C.G. IV, 52, p. 193.

170. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 4, ad 3.

171. S.C.G. IV, 50, p. 185.

172. S.C.G. IV, 52, pp. 190f..

receives human nature from the first parent.<sup>173</sup> Thus he not only agrees with earlier theologians that the individual is merely the recipient of original sin but he refers original sin to the sub-personal level of existence. If his conception of sin enables him to criticize traditional views on account of their failure to allow for culpability, it enables us to level the same charge against his proposal. A natural defect may be a sign of a prior wrong but in Thomist terms, it is not itself sinful because it is involuntary. Thomas may have demonstrated that original sin is a universal condition of human existence but, in so doing, he has sacrificed the significance which the doctrine possesses for the life of the individual. He was, of course, sensitive to this danger and he therefore produced an analogy with which he hoped to show that an inherited fault could be regarded as a sinful matter. Just as the action of a bodily member, such as the hand, may be considered voluntary because it proceeds from the will, so, too, 'the disorder which is in an individual man, a descendant of Adam, is not voluntary by reason of his personal will, but by reason of the will of the first parent, who through a generative impulse, exerts

173. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 1.

influence upon all who descend from him by way of origin.<sup>174</sup>

The use of this analogy fully justifies the attack which Langland's 'masters' made upon theologians who claimed that God would punish men for something of which they were innocent.

For the element of sin is restricted to the act of Adam.

Thomas himself should have realized that the analogy was inadequate. It implies that guilt can be transferred from

a moral to a non-moral agent (will to bodily member). In order to establish that original sin inheres in the individual,

however, he must show how guilt may be transferred from a non-moral to a moral agent. Since God creates each individual

soul and cannot be held responsible for its sin<sup>175</sup> this must be due to the harmful influence which the flesh exerts upon

the soul. The flesh has this power, he says, 'because it is an active principle in generation.'<sup>176</sup>

However, it is difficult to agree with T.C. O'Brien that we are thus shown how the soul

inherits a 'moral fault'.<sup>177</sup> The defect may be 'a flaw in a moral subject' but this flaw is not itself susceptible to moral judgment. It would excuse rather than explain man's

174. Ibid.

175. S.T. I-II, lxxxiii, 1, ad 4, 5.

176. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 4, ad 2.

177. In op. cit., p. 49, note "m".

sin. If a 'natural' defect,<sup>178</sup> instead of a sinful condition, is the source of actual sin, the reality of sin is ultimately destroyed.

Since Thomas was convinced that every man is fully responsible for his own actions, he was not prepared to allow that existence is conditioned by guilt. He denied that the individual inherits an anxiety which betrays his involvement in sin. According to Thomas such anxiety is not a cause but a product of actual sin. If existential anxiety does not precede the commission of sin, however, a satisfactory explanation of moral choice is scarcely possible. Consequently, the Thomist conception of responsibility is undermined. This paradoxical result occurs because, in common with most of his theological predecessors, Thomas was of the opinion that moral values are ontologically determined. The doctrine of original sin therefore had to be introduced in order to explain the presence of evil in the world. Thus the reality of the choice between good and evil would be demonstrated. Augustine certainly realized that the doctrine of original sin would help man to comprehend the mystery of evil because it was in this connection that he first touched on the subject of Adam's sin. When Thomas rejected previous

178. S.C.G. IV, 52, p. 193.

explanations of the way in which original sin is transmitted on the ground that they 'rule out culpability',<sup>179</sup> he failed to appreciate their relevance to the problem of evil. Former theories may have exaggerated the bondage of the individual but his own did not take the power of evil into account. He based the spiritual and moral ambiguity of mankind on a 'natural' defect which consisted in the fact that 'the appetitive faculty obeys the reason, not blindly but with a certain power of opposition.'<sup>180</sup> However, he was also persuaded that man possessed a 'connatural inclination' to his end<sup>181</sup> and that the mind could discern the true and the good.<sup>182</sup> In that case the opposition which the appetite offers to the reason would hardly suffice to confront men with a genuine choice between good and evil. Instead of explaining how evil can captivate man, the Thomist account of original sin explains how man can control evil. In this respect it betrays the optimism of the

179. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 1.

180. S.T. I-II, lviii, 2.

181. v. e.g. S.T. I-II, lxii, 1; cf. xci, 2. This inclination is 'connatural' because it is the product of divine providence, which acts in harmony with the principles of human existence even though it transcends them.

182. e.g. S.T. I-II, xci, 2.

rationalist.

Although we have begun to find fault with the Thomist theory of original sin, we are not yet in a position to conclude that Thomas has failed to provide a clear and convincing alternative to traditional formulations of the doctrine. The paradox which is inherent in his treatment of personal responsibility might bother us but we should remember that medieval man was not distinguished by consistency of thought or action. Furthermore, the contradictory elements in his discussion of hereditary sin are not difficult to remove. If we decide that a demonstration of personal guilt is unnecessary, we can regard original sin as sin in a different or extended sense of the term.<sup>183</sup> Finally, we may agree with Langland's 'masters' that a God who condemns the innocent is not the God of Christian faith but we cannot pretend that such a God is inconceivable. We may therefore feel free to commend the Thomist theory on the ground that it at least attempts to explain the transmission of original sin without emphasizing concupiscence. However, there is

183. Some commentators claim that this is the view which Thomas himself adopted. However, he did state that his aim was to demonstrate the culpability which is inherent in original sin. This he has failed to do. On his own terms, the post-Adamic individual is not responsible for the condition in which he finds himself.



some evidence that Thomas did not intend to reject the Augustinian doctrine in its entirety.

Thomas denies that the children of Christians are exempt from original sin because he maintains the traditional view of the efficacy of baptism. The sacrament removes the guilt which attaches to original sin but it leaves 'the "tinder of sin" (fomes peccati), which is the disorder of the lower powers of the soul and of the body. This is the part of man, not the spiritual, which functions in generation.'<sup>184</sup> T.C. O'Brien remarks that we 'cannot but feel that passage reflects the general opinion, deriving from Augustine, that sexual desire and intercourse are a bad thing made legitimate by marriage.' He points out that this view contradicts 'Thomas's own general position' that original sin is transmitted by that concupiscence which is the condition of human nature, not by that which takes the form of libido.<sup>185</sup> Thomas certainly does distinguish between the fomes and actual concupiscence. 'The fomes is nothing but a certain inordinate, but habitual, concupiscence of the sensitive

184. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 3, ad 2.

185. T.C. O'Brien in op. cit. p. 19, note "i".

appetite; for actual concupiscence is a sinful notion.<sup>186</sup>

Does this mean, however, that his 'Augustinian' statement is simply a piece of dead wood which has drifted in from the past? In his discussion of the Virgin we find him agreeing with Augustine that 'it is lust that transmits original sin to the offspring.'<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, we shall discover that he was greatly indebted to Augustine for his account of the existential significance of original sin.<sup>188</sup>

Hence he claims that sexual intercourse is not likely to take place in the absence of lust.<sup>189</sup> In that case lust can be regarded as the tangible proof, if not the cause, of the transmission of original sin. It therefore remains a consideration which the theologian cannot afford to ignore. Even if Thomas had never stated that lust was responsible for the transmission of original sin, then, his theory would still have resembled that of Augustine. In so far as O'Brien suggests the contrary, he fails to take account of the respect which Thomas chose to pay to tradition.<sup>190</sup>

We are also inclined to doubt whether the distinction which Thomas draws between 'the fomes' and 'actual concupiscence' is as significant as O'Brien seems to think.

186. S.T. III, xxvii, 3.

187. Ibid.

188. v, inf. pp. 497 ff..

189. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 4, ad 3.

190. v. S.T. I, i, 8; especially ad 2.

Let us subject the Thomist conception of concupiscence to closer scrutiny. 'The libido which is said to transmit original sin to the child is not inordinate sexual desire actually experienced. Even supposing it were granted by divine power to a person that he were to feel no inordinate sexual desire in an act of generation, he would still transmit original sin to the offspring.'<sup>191</sup> Although this statement indicates that Thomas preferred to think that lust played no direct part in the transmission of original sin, it also shows that he agreed with Augustine that sinful concupiscence invariably accompanies sexual activity. The latter opinion is not entirely due to his respect for authority. Since the fomes is the habitual 'disorder of the lower powers of the soul and of the body',<sup>192</sup> it is the 'virtual' cause or 'source' of actual sins.<sup>193</sup> Among the sins to which it gives rise, then, is the lust which a person experiences during 'the exercise of the active reproductive powers.'<sup>194</sup> If lust is both a consequence of the fomes and a condition of sexual intercourse, it must surely be a factor in the transmission of original sin. However, Thomas was determined

191. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 4, ad 3.

192. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 3, ad 2; cf. lxxxii, 3; S.C.G. IV. 52, p. 189.

193. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 2, ad 1. Thomas says that all actual sins pre-exist in original sin 'virtually as in a sort of source' (in quodam principio).

194. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 4.

to prevent the stigma of original sin from attaching to the actions of persons who engage in sexual intercourse. Hence he contrasted the natural and the personal elements in procreation and claimed that the transmission of original sin was a natural, or biological, process. 'Semen is a principle in generation, an activity proper to nature and serving reproduction. For this reason the soul is infected rather by semen than by complete flesh, which is already determinately personal'.<sup>195</sup> We would say in reply that this 'activity proper to nature' is only carried out by 'determinately personal flesh.' The 'natural' activity of the semen depends upon the act of the person. In order to deny that parents are directly responsible for the sinful state of their children, then, Thomas was forced to conclude that procreation is the result of an impersonal activity. Sexual intercourse only requires the sensitive powers of the soul to be operative.<sup>196</sup> Thus Thomas agreed with Augustine that sexual activity indicates the animal nature of man. In contrast with Augustine, however, Thomas did not contend that it was degrading for man to become involved in sexual

195. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 2, ad 4 (my italics).

196. v. e.g. S.C.G. IV, 52, p. 193.

activity. For he considered that the chief powers of the soul were not implicated in this form of activity. In other words, he regarded sexual behaviour as an impersonal matter and forgot that he had ever claimed that the appetite was amenable to the control of reason.<sup>197</sup>

Even if the majority of medieval minds could have grasped the rather subtle distinction between habitual and actual concupiscence, it would not have gained a more favourable view of sexual activity. Thomas maintained that lust dominated the realm of sexuality and that sexual intercourse was the means of transmitting original sin from one generation to the next. He did attempt to minimize the influence which original sin exerts upon sexual behaviour but he was unsuccessful because he assumed that 'original' implied 'by way of generation'.<sup>198</sup> This was the traditional presupposition and it guaranteed that theologians would have a low opinion of sexual behaviour. Anselm is the only

197. cf. e.g. his discussion of temperance - v. inf. pp. 503, ff.. In his discussion of the Virgin Thomas categorically denies that the natural and the personal aspects of original sin can be separated - 'if the fomes were entirely taken away as to personal corruption, it could not remain as to the corruption of nature' (S.T. III, xxvii, 5). What made the Virgin unique was her ability to resist the personal inclination to evil. Other men and women do succumb to this inclination, especially in their sexual activity (v. e.g. S.T. I-II, lxxxiii, 4; cf. lxxxii, 3). This implies that sexual intercourse is not an impersonal matter and that the transmission of original sin is not simply a natural process.

198. v. sup. p. 475.

theologian whom we have found to challenge the traditional pattern of thought.

(ii) The content of original sin.

Thomas distinguishes between a formal and a material aspect of the defect in man's specific nature. In his discussions of original and other kinds of virtue and vice, however, the terms 'form' and 'matter' are not employed in quite the same manner as in his metaphysical discussions. The form of an ethical matter determines its specific character<sup>199</sup> but need not be the source of its activity. In the case of original sin this would be impossible because its formal cause consists in the privation of something. Although the material dimension of original sin is the result of this privation, then, the elements of which it is composed are those which human nature possessed before it succumbed to temptation. It will become evident that this ethical conception of form and matter is somewhat analogous to that of cause and effect.<sup>200</sup>

a. The formal aspect of original sin.

In so far as the form of a thing determines its specific character, form may be identified with cause.<sup>201</sup>

199. cf. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 3; xviii, 2.

200. cf. S.T. I-II, lxxxvii, 7.

201. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 3.

Now, the cause of original sin was the disobedience of Adam. Since Thomas denied that one man could share the responsibility for the sin of another, however, he could not identify original sin with the fault of Adam. He claimed instead that it consisted of the deprivation which human nature incurred because of the sin of its progenitor.

When human nature was created it 'was so fashioned ... that the lower powers were perfectly subject to the soul, the reason to God, and the body to the soul, God supplying by grace that which nature lacked for the purpose.' In Adam, however, human reason rebelled against God and, as a result, the latent deficiency of nature became apparent. The 'boon' of original justice was forfeited and human nature was reduced to a state in which the 'lower powers ceased to be perfectly subject to reason' and the body to the soul.<sup>202</sup> 'So then the lack of original justice subjecting the will to God is what is formal in original sin. Every other disorder in the various powers of the soul is like what is material in original sin.'<sup>203</sup>

Many commentators have noted that the use which Thomas makes of the category of justice in his account of

202. S.C.G. IV, 52, pp. 191f..

203. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 3.

original sin derives from Anselm.<sup>204</sup> However, there is a wide divergence between their respective concepts of justice. Anselm presumed that justice was both a divine and a human attribute and he emphasized the function of the will. He described justice as rectitude of the will maintained for its own sake. Thus it was considered to be a dynamic quality and one which determined relations between man and God as well as those between man and man. Thomas adopts the Aristotelian concept of justice. It 'is towards another person to whom it renders its due.'<sup>205</sup> Hence the proper use of the term is restricted. It applies to human 'operations in which there is an element of something due or undue to another.'<sup>206</sup> In contrast with Anselm, then, Thomas regards justice as a function of reason. The assessment of deserts is considered to be more important than the movement of the will. Justice thus becomes a rather static and impersonal matter. Moreover, Thomas doubts whether justice is a term which can be predicated of God. The First Cause of being is necessarily self-sufficient and therefore cannot be subject to a 'debt of justice.' Since God preserves the

204. e.g. T.C. O'Brien in *op. cit.*, p. 37, note "a"; Eugene R. Fairweather (ed.) in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm To Ockham*, L.C.C., vol. X, S.C.M., 1956, pp. 53f..

205. S.C.G. II, 28, p. 50.

206. S.T. I-II, lx, 2; cf. 3 and ad l.



relations which he establishes between the various parts of his creation, however, he does manifest a limited form of justice.<sup>207</sup> Thomas prefers to describe this activity of Providence as the maintenance of the Eternal Law.<sup>208</sup>

Man participates in the Eternal Law because he is both a creature and a rational being. In common with other parts of creation, the very structure of his being is determined by the Eternal Law. 'Since all things are regulated and measured by Eternal Law ... it is evident that all somehow share in it, in that their tendencies to their own proper acts and ends are from its impression.'<sup>209</sup> However, man is also an intelligent creature and he can therefore discern the Eternal Law and govern his own activities.<sup>209</sup> The original justice which was forfeited by Adam was a direct form of participation in the eternal purpose. For it depended upon the gift of God and not the exercise of the rational powers. It was a gift which was bestowed upon man's specific nature, and it therefore belonged primarily to the substance of the soul and not to the powers of the soul, such as the intellect or the will.<sup>210</sup>

207. S.C.G. II, 28-29, pp. 58-56.

208. S.T. I-II, xci, 1.

209. S.T. I-II, xci, 2.

210. S.T. I-II, lxxxiii, 2.

Since these powers are 'the principles of personal action' they are 'more bound up with the individual.'<sup>211</sup> When Thomas describes original sin as the loss of original justice, then, he is not agreeing with Anselm that man is in a state of actual aversion to God, but he is suggesting that man has lost the complacent communion with God which was his original state. If this loss were total it would constitute a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for the exercise of free choice.<sup>212</sup> However, it is only a partial loss. Man's 'connatural inclination' to virtue is weakened but not destroyed.<sup>213</sup> The natural principles of his existence continue to direct him towards his proper end.<sup>214</sup> Although they do not enable him to attain it 'without the Divine assistance', they are only deficient because natural principles alone are inadequate means to a

211. Ibid, ad 2.

212. Total loss of direct communion with God would provide the soul with that autonomy which is the subjective condition of free choice. However, there is also an objective condition of free choice. Man must be presented with alternatives between which he has to decide. Since Thomas maintains that original sin does not prevent man from discerning the Eternal Law by means of his rational powers, he envisages a state of wisdom in which man is not confronted with basic moral choices because he has apprehended the goal of his life and knows how to attain it. For such a man moral choice will simply be a technical matter of deciding which of the virtues he is required to practise and which of his neighbours he is required to serve. He will know neither the anxiety nor the agony of choosing between good and evil.

213. S.T. I-II, lxxxv, 1.

214. S.T. I-II, lxii, 1.

'supernatural end' and not because sin has become a determinant of human existence.<sup>215</sup> The 'divine assistance' consists of grace which restores the 'divine impression' in the soul and so enables man to practise the theological virtues which lead him to his supernatural end.<sup>216</sup> Thus Thomas matches his doctrine of original sin with a doctrine of grace in which the dynamics of existence are ignored. Grace is an element which God infuses into the soul rather than a quality which informs his treatment of persons in history.

Thomas regards 'the privation of original justice' as 'the very essence of original sin'.<sup>217</sup> The character of original sin is thus conceived in purely rational terms.

215. Ibid. Thomas does not deny the universality of sin or the necessity of the atonement. However, it is difficult for him to demonstrate that the atonement was necessary. For this reason, perhaps, he tends to give the material aspect of original sin more of the appearance of sin (v. inf. pp. 497 ff. ). Since he minimizes man's bondage to sin, he also emphasizes the divine grace of the Incarnation as much as that of the Passion. Anselm contended that God had to enter into history in order to release man from his debt to justice and challenge him to redirect his will. Hence he emphasized the dynamic action of God in history, especially in the crucifixion. However, Thomas considered that man required, above all, to have his nature restored by a new infusion of the grace which Adam had lost. This was foreshadowed and guaranteed in the Incarnation when, assuming the flesh of Adam without the stain of original sin, Christ showed that 'the nature itself might be healed by the assumption' (my italics).

216. c.g. S.T. I-II, ex, 4, ad 3; cxi, 1; cf. lxxv, 2; 3.

217. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 2.

There has been a loss of communion between reason (the soul) and God. The apprehension of original sin also becomes a matter of pure reason. For the loss of original justice does not entail that man will turn from God to the world. Now, this revolution, which involves 'aversion to God' (aversio Dei) and 'conversion to the world' (conversio mundi) is the essence of sin.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, the individual can decline all responsibility for original sin. On no account, then, does it seem possible to describe the loss of original justice as sin. The doctrine of original sin thus becomes an imposition upon reality rather than an interpretation of reality. Reason applies the label of sin, with all its fearful implications,<sup>219</sup> to a condition whose sinful character it is unable to discern.<sup>220</sup> It does so, of course,

218. e.g. S.T. I-II, lxxxiv, 3, ad 2; lxxxvii, 4.

219. Although Thomas refused to consign unbaptised infants to the torments of hell he also refused to allow them entrance into the kingdom of God. He has therefore made little break with theological tradition. The 'natural' defect which children inherit from their parents is sufficient to prevent them from attaining the vision of God which is their proper end. cf. Supp. lxxi, 7; cf. S.C.G. IV, 91, p. 508; S.T. I-II, lxxxvi, 2; lxxxvii, 6, and inf. on the reliability of the Supplement to the Summa Theologica.

220. However numerous its deficiencies the Augustinian account of concupiscence at least succeeded in making original sin real to man. Its deplorable effect on man's appreciation of his sexuality is largely due to this "success".

because it is subject to the teaching authority of the Church. The 'truth' of original sin has to be accepted by reason, although it cannot be apprehended by reason.

b. The material aspect of original sin.

Since man is separated from God, he is subject to suffering and death. However, these are not the only marks of original sin. Owing to the loss of original justice man is also prone to error and unable 'wholly' to overcome his animal propensities.<sup>221</sup> We shall concentrate upon the account that Thomas gives of the latter weakness because he regarded sexual behaviour as a product of the desires which man shares with animals. However, we should emphasize that he considers the lack of sexual restraint to be but one element in the material part of original sin. Thus he departs from the 'Augustinian' tradition which had endeavoured to 'locate' original sin in one sphere of existence.

Man is inclined to yield to his animal desires because of an underlying concupiscence. Thomas thus maintains his distinction between habitual and actual concupiscence.

221. S.C.G. IV, 52, p. 189.

Concupiscence is essentially a 'disorder of the (non-rational) powers of the soul' which 'is chiefly noticeable in an unrul'd turning to goods that pass away'.<sup>222</sup> It is the 'virtual source' of actual sins,<sup>223</sup> especially those which derive from the concupiscible appetite, or the desire for natural pleasure. For such desire is a 'primal passion' which 'more vividly excites and is more vividly felt'.<sup>224</sup> In the light of this analysis we must reject the summary which O'Brien makes of Thomist theory. Thomas does not equate concupiscence with 'the removal of the restraint given by original justice'.<sup>225</sup> On the contrary, he describes it as 'a positive disposition in the powers of the soul to created goods.' In other words, concupiscence is not just a neutral state of desire. The 'fomes' or 'habitual concupiscence' is 'inordinate' and it therefore produced a personal inclination to evil. Hence the Virgin Mary had to be sanctified in order to be preserved from this sinful inclination.<sup>226</sup>

This view of concupiscence leads to further contradictions in the Thomist account of original sin.

222. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 3; cf. lxxxv, 3.

223. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 2, ad 1.

224. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 3, ad 2.

225. T.C. O'Brien in op. cit., p. 39, note "g". This view overlooks the distinction which Thomas makes between the formal and the material aspects of original sin.

226. S.T. III, xxvii, 3.

Unless concupiscence is distinguished from a positive disposition to evil, the equality of original sin is prejudiced. For the inclination to sin varies from man to man.<sup>227</sup> If it is the product of a common loss of original justice, then the latter must be liable to variation too. Thus universality will be the only constant of original sin. In his discussion of concupiscence Thomas also implies that original sin is something more than the absence of communion with God. If the loss of original justice produces an 'inordinate' disposition to mundane goods, it sets man in a state of 'aversion to God' and 'conversion to the world.' Thus his bondage will be as complete as Augustine had maintained. Furthermore, the form of the bondage is disappointingly Augustinian. Although Thomas does not confine the influence of original sin to one sphere of existence, he does argue that peculiar damage has been done to the components of sexuality. Since 'the corruption of original sin is passed on through the act of generation', the reproductive powers, the concupiscible appetite, and the sense of touch 'which concur in this act are especially said

227. Thomas was aware of this. v. S.T. I-II, lxxiii, 4, ad 1. He might have argued that the variation in concupiscence had nothing to do with the fomes and was due to the habits which a person formed during the course of his life. However, I have found no evidence of such an argument.

to be infected.<sup>228</sup> It is therefore inevitable that Thomas should doubt the possibility of sexual intercourse without lust<sup>229</sup> and that he should sometimes speak as if this were a factor in the transmission of original sin.<sup>230</sup> Such views are bound to appear when the notions of original and generation are equated. Although he claimed that original sin was less serious than actual sin or vice, then, Thomas conceived of concupiscence in terms which suggest that original sin is rooted in man's sexual nature and that it possesses the basic character of sin. He also insisted that concupiscence was a permanent condition of existence. Baptism restores communion between man and God but it cannot eradicate concupiscence.<sup>231</sup>

It would not be true to say that Thomas was content to follow the traditional interpretations of original sin. He refused to identify it with concupiscence and he rarely suggested that its transmission was due to the presence of lust in the sexual act. Nevertheless, he did maintain that it was transmitted by means of an act which invariably expresses lust and he believed that it had a radical influence on the concupiscible appetite and so on sexual

228. S.T. I-II, lxxxiii, 4.

229. S.T. I-II, lxxxii, 4, ad 3.

230. cf. sup. pp. 485 f. and note 197, p. 489.

231. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 3, ad 2.



activity. Hence concupiscence appears to possess more of the character of sin than that privation of original justice which is the essence of original sin. In spite of his dissatisfaction with previous accounts of original sin, then, Thomas failed to produce an alternative which would do justice to human sexuality. This failure was due in part to the manner in which he approached the subject. In common with most of his predecessors, he thought that it was necessary to concentrate upon the factors in human procreation. His account of original sin also suffered from the respect which he felt for the doctrinal authorities of the Church. The influence of Augustine, in particular, helps to explain many of the contradictions which have crept into his discussion. It is therefore possible to exaggerate both the novelty and the value his treatment of original sin. For he did not provide a clear alternative to the tradition and he was not greatly concerned about the need of a more appreciative view of sex. The reasons for his cautious departure from the 'Augustinian' position were theological and philosophical rather than ethical. He realized that a doctrine which referred to a universal condition of mankind could not be founded upon a contingency such as the presence of lust in the sexual act, and that it was relevant to all

spheres of human existence and activity. These considerations, together with his philosophical conception of sin, did prevent him from identifying original sin with a particular element in the structure of reality. Thus he avoided the worst excesses of some earlier views of concupiscence.

The Thomist account of original sin has encouraged Western man to think that the sinfulness of mankind cannot be inferred from existential reality. Acceptance of the doctrine has come to require submission to the authority of the Catholic faith instead of recognition of the influence which sin exerts upon human life. Man is asked to believe that he is legitimately punished for the sin of another and that this punishment may involve his eternal separation from God. The arbitrary character of the doctrine arose from the introduction of a philosophical conception of sin into the framework of theology, and it was bound to jeopardize an appreciation of human sinfulness. Independent spirits soon began to attack the doctrine. Among them were the 'masters' to whom the fourteenth century poet William Langland referred in his Piers Plowman. They maintained that the theologians had invented a monstrous fiction.<sup>232</sup>

232. v. sup.pp. 470 f..

D. The Thomist view of temperance.

The 'special virtue' of temperance consists in 'withholding the appetite from those things which are most seductive to man.'<sup>233</sup> We have already commented upon the individualism which pervades the Thomist treatment of sexuality. Thomas requires man to control his desires in order that he might attain a goal which is adapted to his rationality. The social value of temperance is therefore limited. Although the precepts of law are concerned with the common good, they 'include individual ends, for the plan for the common good ... really has to come down to them.'<sup>234</sup> 'Temperance is engaged with the actual desires for food, drink, and sex, all of which subserve the common good of nature.'<sup>235</sup> Thus Thomas can promote the virtue of the individual without altogether ignoring the value of social order.

Thomas states that the cardinal virtues, are those which have 'a foremost claim to praise on account of one of those things that are requisite for the notion of virtue in general.' Temperance belongs to this category because it calls for moderation.<sup>236</sup> In common with the other cardinal

233. S.T. II-II, cxli, 2.

234. S.T. I-II, xc, 2, ad 1.

235. S.T. I-II, xciv, 3, ad 1.

236. S.T. II-II, cxli, 7.

virtues, it can be divided into three parts 'namely integral, subjective, and potential.'<sup>237</sup> We shall consider his treatment of one factor in each part.

'The integral parts of a virtue are the conditions the concurrence of which are necessary for virtue.' The necessary conditions of temperance are shamefacedness and honesty or 'spiritual beauty.'<sup>238</sup> The former 'regards ... the disgrace inherent to vice' and so falls short of 'the perfection of virtue' in which no base action is considered or performed.<sup>239</sup> However, we may doubt whether this inferior virtue is more relevant to temperance than to the other cardinal virtues. Thomas proves the connection between shame and temperance with reasons which again betray his sympathy with the traditional attitude to the sensual nature of man. Intemperance is the most disgraceful vice for two reasons. 'First, because it is most repugnant to human excellence, since it is about pleasures common to us and the lower animals ... Secondly, because it is most repugnant to man's charity or beauty; inasmuch as the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the clarity and beauty of virtue

237. S.T. II-II, cxliii, 1.

238. S.T. II-II, cxliii, 1; cxlv, 2.

239. S.T. II-II, cxliv, 1; 2.

arises ...<sup>240</sup> Hence 'shamefacedness pertains more to temperance than to any other virtue, by reason of its motive cause, which is base action ...'<sup>241</sup> Thomas claims that sins of the sensitive appetite are peculiarly base because he accepts the traditional understanding of the opposition between the life of the spirit and the life of the flesh. This substitutes a contrast between two spheres of human existence for an account of the alternative loyalties which existence sets before the whole man (totus homo). Thomas contrasts life according to reason with life according to the sensitive powers of the soul or the bodily appetites.<sup>242</sup> Nevertheless he is forced to admit that there is something 'base and disgraceful' about all forms of vice. Such a view is implicit in his conception of sin as a turning from God to the world. Hence the difference between the baseness of sensual pleasure and that of other vices is merely one of degree and 'shamefacedness may also pertain to other virtues.'<sup>243</sup> In that case it should not be maintained that sensual forms of sin are peculiarly degrading but, as his

240. S.T. II-II, cxlii, 4.

241. S.T. II-II, cxliv, 1, ad 2.

242. For the equation of spirit and mind (which includes the powers of intellect and will) cf. e.g. S.T. I, xciii, 6; xcvi, 3; I-II, lxxxi, 3, ad 2; III, xxxiii, 2; S.C.G. III, 115, pp. 962..

243. S.T. II-II cxliv, 1, ad 2.

earlier remarks reveal, Thomas was not anxious to forgo this idea. He describes the baseness of sensual forms of sin in terms which would have satisfied theologians who believed that the quality of baseness was only applicable to sins of the flesh.

Although sexual behaviour in the Middle Ages may often have warranted the charge of shamelessness, we should recall that theologians tended to doubt whether man could engage in any sexual activity that was not shameful. Thomas states that 'in the relations between husband and wife there is a certain natural shame'<sup>244</sup> and it is not difficult to guess what he has in mind. Even if conditions appear to justify such a negative attitude to sexual life it can only be self-defeating. It had been reiterated by patristic and medieval theologians and had obviously done little to improve sexual mores. In view of the bias which informed the theological treatment of sexuality, we may also suspect that sexual behaviour was rarely as shameless as the theologians would have us believe.

Thomas presents a view of shame which is even more inimical to an appreciation of sexuality than his conception of the degrading character of sensual forms of sin.

244. S.C.G. III, 125, pp. 119f.; cf. S.T. II-II, cli, 4; III, xxix, 4, ad 3.

Since he regards shame as a purely negative movement, he can only allow it to be a secondary, or penultimate form of virtue. It is not found among the truly virtuous because they have transcended all that is base in human life.<sup>245</sup> This implies that shame is not a feeling which is proper to man. Those for whom it remains an existential reality have not attained the perfect state of virtue. Those who are married can never do so because they have committed themselves to a relationship in which shame is an integral element. The perfection of man consists in a 'godly' form of shamelessness which knows that there are objects of shame but manages to avoid them.

Thomas failed to discern any intrinsic value in shame and was therefore unable to regard it as a necessary feature of existence because he subscribed to a monistic conception of the motives and functions of human behaviour. Reason analyses virtue in terms of the relation between subject and object, so that the healthiness of human personality is assessed in the light of the objectives which it pursues. If a particular object is considered unworthy

245. Thomas states this opinion in the form of an hypothesis, saying that 'if there were anything disgraceful in them they would be ashamed of it' (S.T. II-II, cxliv, 4). However, this would mean that they were not 'truly virtuous.'

of man, the sole purpose of the virtue (or of its 'integral part') is to prevent man from seeking that object. Thus Thomas claims that the purpose of temperance is to 'withhold' man from certain things.<sup>246</sup> A fundamental dimension of virtue is thereby overlooked, namely, its intrinsic significance for the life of the person with regard both to his self-understanding and to his dealings with other people. This oversight is confirmed by a rationalistic account of being in which the historicity of man is described as his movement towards an ordained end. Virtue is thus denied any intrinsic value and reduced to the status of a means to the proper end of man. Even the virtue of charity, which Thomas considers to be the essence of perfection, cannot wholly escape this debasement. Charity is supposed to quicken human relations but it is of supreme value because it enables the individual to enter into a sublime realm of life.<sup>247</sup> Whether virtue is regarded as a means to an end or as the proper orientation to a set of objects, then, the result is the same. The contribution that virtue can make to the social life of man tends to be forgotten.

246. S.T. II-II, cxli, 2.

247. v. inf. pp. 545 f. .



A monistic understanding of virtue causes Thomas to misinterpret the part which shame plays in preserving the integrity of the individual. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has pointed out that shame is the shield which prevents man's loss of unity with himself and with his world from dominating and so destroying his own life as well as the lives of others.<sup>248</sup> Thus shame is a product of those distorted features of existence to which the doctrine of original sin refers. Since Thomas thought that original sin only involved a loss of communion between man and God, he failed to appreciate that shame has deeper roots than the mere presence of base objects. However, shame implies more than a sense of guilt. It enables man to cope with the divided state of reality which he inherits. This inner division or inadequacy of man is most apparent in those spheres of existence in which the personality can be expressed to the full. If sex is one such sphere, it is by no means the only or the most important one. Man reveals himself as much, if not more, in his speaking (the sphere of language). Shame attaches itself properly to these areas of life for its restraining influence helps to protect the individual from exposing his vulnerability. It thus has both a preservative and a paeducic function in

248. D. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. by E. Bethge, S.C.M., 1955, pp. 145 ff..

the life of the individual. In spite of the discord which he finds in himself and in his world he can, with the aid of shame, lay hold on a form of unity and begin to deal responsibly with existence. Without allowing him to forget or deny his basic insufficiency, then, shame offers him a knowledge of his own value and of certain areas of life where he must tread carefully in order to preserve it.

Since its value for the individual is closely tied to his self-expression or self-exposure, it is clear that shame is as relevant to his social or public life as it is to his solitary or private life. For it exercises its protective function at precisely those points where communion with other persons is most complete. It thus points unmistakably to the individual's responsibility not just for his own integrity but for that of the people he meets. If his sexual behaviour or his conversation too quickly and lightly reveals the secrets of his own being, then he is not only exposing himself to the dangers of rejection or shallow acceptance, either of which may destroy his self-esteem, but he is also tempting the other to a similarly careless and dangerous self-revelation.

Since Thomas denies that shame is of intrinsic benefit to the individual, he completely ignores the

contribution which it makes to personal relations. Its purpose does not consist in challenging the individual to dissociate himself from all who do not share his values. Neither shame nor the type of virtue which it supports is so inimical to the adventurous, creative activity of the human spirit. The stability which shame offers the individual personality enables man to enter freely into situations in which his values may be challenged without the fear that he will be overwhelmed by hostile forces. Even the service which shame renders to the individual, then, has his social intercourse in view. Beyond this, however, it underlines man's responsibility for others by attaching itself to those fields of behaviour in which he is most open to his neighbour.

When the positive and dynamic character of shame is appreciated, when its contribution to personal integrity is discerned, then it can also be seen that the objects of shame are not necessarily reprehensible. Although the feeling of shame may discourage a person from engaging in sexual intercourse, it does not imply that sexual intercourse is degrading. It serves instead to maintain the deeply personal significance of this act because it warns against an easy gratification of sexual desire. If there is an element of shame in the sexual relations between husband

and wife, then, it indicates the depth of personal involvement in the marital relationship rather than the indecency of sexual desire. Thomas not only fails to discern the intrinsic value of shame when it is a movement of total aversion but he fails to appreciate that it is not always opposed to its proper objects. Shame teaches man to value himself, not by devaluing certain aspects of his life, but by pointing to their rich potential.

Thomas categorically denies that 'all carnal intercourse is sinful.' He considers this opinion to be 'unreasonable.'<sup>249</sup> However, his notions of baseness and shame reveal an attitude towards sex which is very similar to that of earlier theologians. He ignores the capacity of sex to enrich personal life and, by his treatment of shame, he strikes at the heart of the lives of the faithful, most of whom will have known this quite proper human feeling. By such means he was able to demonstrate the moral excellence and so the authority of a church which was ruled by celibates.

'The subjective parts of a virtue are its species : and the species of a virtue have to be differentiated according to the difference of matter or object. Now temperance is about pleasures of touch, which are of two kinds'. There are those which result from nourishment and the specific

249. S.C.G. III, 126, p. 121; cf. S.T. II-II, ciii, 2.

virtues which they require are abstinence and sobriety. Tactile pleasure is also experienced in the course of procreation and the specific virtues which apply to that process are chastity and purity. Chastity regards the pleasure of the act of procreation while purity regards 'the pleasures incidental to the act, resulting, for instance, from kissing, touching, or fondling.<sup>250</sup> Thus it 'is directed to chastity, not as a virtue distinct therefrom, but as expressing a circumstance of chastity.'<sup>251</sup> Since we shall later examine what Thomas has to say about marriage and celibacy, which are forms of chastity, we shall first take the opportunity to consider his treatment of lust, the vice which is opposed to chastity.

Thomas begins his account of lust by reminding us that it 'consists in seeking venereal pleasure not in accordance with right reason.'<sup>252</sup> Now, reason stipulates that the proper end of the venereal act is procreation. Anything which hinders 'the begetting of children' will therefore be a form of lust. The specific forms of lust are determined by the woman who is the object of sexual attention. Thomas proposes this means of distinguishing the species of lust 'because in the venereal act the woman is passive and by way of matter.'<sup>253</sup> Thus the masculine bias of theology

250. S.T. II-II, cxliii, 1.

251. S.T. II-II, cli, 4.

252. S.T. II-II, cliiv, 1.

253. Ibid.

is reinforced by the tyranny of reason which insists that sexual behaviour should be analysed in terms of the relations between a subject and an object. The 'matter' of virtue lies outside the person in whom virtue is found. Consequently the personal character of human relations is not taken into account. It is considered to be a mere circumstance of behaviour which is judged to be right or wrong on other grounds.<sup>254</sup> A circumstance can only augment or diminish the goodness or the badness of an act.<sup>255</sup> The irrelevance of 'personal circumstances' is most evident in the analysis which Thomas makes of fornication.

Simple fornication, 'which is the union of an unmarried man with an unmarried woman',<sup>256</sup> is the mildest form of lust because it 'is committed without injustice to another person'.<sup>257</sup> However, it is a mortal sin because

254. S.T. I-II, xviii, 10. However, reason may treat a particular circumstance 'as the main condition' of the act. When theft is committed in a holy place, for example, the location of the act has lost 'the function of a circumstance' and so becomes a major ethical consideration.

255. S.T. I-II, xviii, 11.

256. S.T. II-II, cliv, 1.

257. S.T. II-II, cliv, 12. Thomas is thinking of the justice which is relevant to 'operations in which there is an element of something due or undue to another', such as 'buying and selling' (S.T. I-II, lx, 2). According to his definition of the justice 'which seeks the common good' and not just 'the private good of an individual' (S.T. I-II, lx, 3) fornication does involve injustice because it neglects the needs of any child that such a union may produce. cf. inf..

'it is opposed to the good of the child's upbringing' and 'every sin committed directly against human life is a mortal sin'. Since 'the upbringing of a human child requires not only the mother's care for his nourishment, but much more the care of his father as guide and guardian, and under whom he progresses in goods both internal and external', the union of the sexes must be regulated by law. Thomas does consider the case of the man who makes adequate provision for his illegitimate child. We are bluntly reminded that the law judges 'according to what happens in general, and not according to what may happen in a particular case.'<sup>258</sup>

Although this statement is made in defence of the legal basis of ethics, it inadvertently reveals the ethical limitations of law and of the form of reason on which the law is based. Thomas sometimes admits that law is not an adequate principle of moral judgment<sup>259</sup> but he refuses to allow for exceptional cases because he is so concerned about the preservation of order. The common good, which in this case is the continuation of the human race (species) in the person of the child, tends to obliterate the good of individuals and their personal relations. Thomas was prepared to state

258. S.T. II-II, cliv, 2.

259. S.T. I-II, xcvi, 6.

that 'individuals are for the sake of the species',<sup>260</sup> and we cannot agree with those of his supporters who suggest that he was enunciating a metaphysical principle which was devoid of ethical implications.<sup>261</sup>

Thomas only introduces the notion of justice into his discussion of lust because the preservation of social order is at stake. Unjust sexual behaviour is failure to respect what is due to another in the sense of property which belongs to him. If the property is his child, the species of lust is deduction; if it is his wife lust takes the form of adultery.<sup>262</sup> In the former case alone does Thomas bother to consider the welfare of the woman. He points out that a girl who has been seduced may fail to attract suitors and so lapse into a life of wantonness.<sup>263</sup> Thus her father would be deprived of his property. In view of the conception of private justice with which Thomas operates, we may be sure that his chief concern was the plight of the father and not that of the daughter. He took little interest in the effect which a sexual relationship has on the participants.

260. S.C.G. III, 112, p.91; cf. II, 93, p.285; S.T. I-II, xc, 2.

261. e.g. T. Gilby (ed.) in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 28, Blackfriars, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966, p. 10, note "d". The distinction that Maritain makes between the individual and the person may be 'helpful' but it is not made by Thomas.

262. S.T. II-II, cliv, 12.

263. S.T. II-II, cliv, 6.



The potential parts of a cardinal virtue are secondary virtues which contribute to the performance of the cardinal virtue. Thus 'any virtue that is effective of moderation in some matter or other, and restrains the appetite in its impulse towards something, may be reckoned a part of temperance, as a virtue annexed thereto.' Such a virtue is modesty which is concerned with such matters as 'the outward movements of the body' and 'outward apparel'.<sup>264</sup> Neither simple nor ornate forms of medieval dress were designed to emphasize sexual distinction and Thomas therefore realized that the sexes were liable to similar temptations in regard to the use of apparel. In the case of female dress, however, he claimed that there was 'something special' because 'it may incite men to lust'. In order to substantiate this claim, which is indicative of his hostility to women and his subservience to tradition, he refers to the warning that is found in the seventh chapter of the book of Proverbs.<sup>265</sup> Although we have no doubt that the medieval woman was a wily creature, we are equally certain that she had little control over the lust of the male. Nevertheless, theologians such as Thomas encouraged her to

264. S.T. II-II, cxliii, 1; clxviii; clxix.

265. S.T. II-II, clxix, 2.

think that the manner in which she presented herself exerted great influence upon men. Had she been reluctant to test this theory, Western forms of dress might have taken longer to become sexually distinctive. It is interesting to note that puritans of more recent times have sought to preserve the distinctive apparel of the sexes whereas Thomas, whose 'puritanism' was largely due to his aversion for novelty,<sup>266</sup> sought to prevent it.

Although we consider that the attitude which Thomas adopts towards female dress is a sign of male prejudice, we can at least approve of the emphasis which he places on the exercise of responsibility for the neighbour. This emphasis is maintained throughout his discussion of modesty. Thus he warns that frivolity becomes a mortal sin when 'the acts employed for the purpose of fun' are injurious to other people.<sup>267</sup> In order to explain the interest which Thomas at last decides to take in the relational implications of temperance we must refer again to his conception of modesty. He claims that modesty is one of the virtues which are 'annexed' to temperance because it moderates desires which are less compulsive than the sexual urge. Modesty is therefore less concerned with the inner life of the

266. S.T. II-II, clxix, 1.

267. S.T. II-II, clxviii, 3.

individual than the temperance which it promotes. Hence it allows man to pay greater attention to the needs of his neighbour. Furthermore, modesty is only identifiable because of its constant mode of operation.<sup>268</sup> In contrast with some of the other virtues it is not directed to a single object. Thomas was therefore in a position to include the welfare of the neighbour among its ends.

We have described Thomas as a puritan but we must beware of exaggerating the implications of this term. Thomas never claimed that pleasure was something that a virtuous man would avoid at all costs. During his analysis of the earnest character, however, he did contend that 'in human life, pleasure and rest are not in quest for their own sake.' Although he admitted that a lack of mirth would be burdensome to other people, then, he was convinced that it was less sinful than its opposite.<sup>269</sup> The restraint which he sought to impose upon female dress is a further indication of the puritanical element in his thought. He considered that all forms of novelty and extravagance were suspect because he believed that 'nature no more abounds in superfluities than fails in necessities.'<sup>270</sup> Perhaps the most conclusive

268. S.T. II-II, clx, 2, ad 2.

269. S.T. II-II, clxviii, 4.

270. S.T. I-II, xci, 2, obj. 1; cf. ad 1.

evidence of his puritanism is the alacrity with which he quoted sayings of the Desert Fathers.<sup>271</sup> We have seen reason to believe that the collections which John Cassian made of these sayings were largely responsible for the ascetic temper of medieval theology. We can now have no doubt that Thomas was one of the many who had imbibed the spirit of asceticism.

More than one historian has drawn attention to the impulsive character of medieval behaviour.<sup>272</sup> Although we have expressed dissatisfaction with the individualistic terms in which Thomas conceived the virtue of temperance, then, we recognize that the value which he ascribed to self-control was justified. The conditions of existence could not improve until men learned to curb their elementary desires. Furthermore, we cannot pretend that Thomas completely ignored the contribution which temperance can make to personal relations. He rated the welfare of society above that of individuals but he expected that the former would usually include the latter. Thus he considered that it was legitimate to treat women as pieces of property and doubtless believed that such treatment would help a woman to maintain her

271. v. e.g. S.T. II-II, clxviii, 2; clv, 1.

272. v. e.g. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., pp. 57ff.; 235ff.; 254f.; J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, op. cit., ch. 1.

integrity. If we disregard the conception of female integrity on which Thomas based this view of sexual relations, we shall notice that he has taken an important aspect of moral responsibility into account. The social status of the neighbour need not determine the manner in which one deals with him but it is at least worthy of respect. Thomas also realized that personal integrity was prone to more insidious forms of assault. He therefore emphasized that modesty was a means of protecting the interests of a neighbour. In short, his account of temperance contains a number of valuable insights even though it is in some respects inadequate.

#### E. The Thomist view of marriage.

We have already had occasion to note certain aspects of the order which Thomas discerned in marriage. The husband rules over a household which comprises the wife with whom he may enjoy sexual intercourse, despite the shame which accompanies this act, and the children whose presence signifies that one purpose of the marital association has been fulfilled. In this section we shall examine the systematic treatment which marriage receives in the Supplement

to the Summa Theologica.<sup>273</sup> Although Thomas had much to say about the essence of marriage, we shall discover that he added little to the views of his predecessors.

He maintains the traditional account of the goods which attach to matrimony 'as a sacrament of the Church: namely, children to be begotten and brought up to worship God; faithfulness, in as much as one husband is bound to one wife; and the sacrament, in as much as it is an indissoluble union, symbolising the union of Christ with the Church.'<sup>274</sup>

The first of these goods harmonizes with his conception of the purpose of human sexuality and must have helped to confirm

273. The Supplement was compiled after Thomas had died. It consists of material which Thomas probably intended to revise and include in the final part of the Summa Theologica. Some of the views which are advanced in the Supplement are difficult to reconcile with others that are found in the Summa but I have not discovered any in the section which deals with the sacrament of matrimony. Problems of interpretation do occur but these are to be explained by the nature of the questions raised and the more expansive treatment that they receive. In order to avoid unnecessary arguments, however, I have refrained from using the material in the Supplement as a definitive account of Thomist thought.

274. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 268.

it. His notion of marital faithfulness is hardly designed to edify the personal relations between husband and wife. The faith which is a good of marriage is simply 'a part of justice.'<sup>275</sup> Thomas is here thinking of justice in the narrow sense of rendering something that is due to another. Those who consent to marriage grant each other 'the power to have carnal intercourse.'<sup>276</sup> Faith, therefore requires each partner to respect the right of the other to receive 'payment of the marriage debt.'<sup>277</sup> This view of faithfulness matches the view of adultery which Thomas elaborates during his discussion of the various forms of lust. There we are told that adultery is harmful because it damages the property which belongs to oneself or to another. The person who is married and commits adultery sins against his or her spouse and jeopardizes the welfare of his or her offspring. The single man who commits adultery with a married woman 'hinders the good of another's children.' The same is not said of the single woman who commits adultery with a married man because children were regarded as the property of the

275. Supp. xlix, 2, ad 2, 5; cf. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 267; S.T. II-II, cliv, 8. ad 2; cf. ad 1.

276. Supp. xlviii, 1.

277. Supp. xlix, 2, ad 5.

male.<sup>278</sup> In the light of the Thomist conception of the goal of the sexual act, however, his failure to consider the possible consequence of this irregular union is quite remarkable. It indicates that he considered the property of the male to be more important than the welfare of the female and any child that she might bear.

In order to explain the sacramental nature of marriage Thomas goes to great lengths. Since the church was asserting that this aspect of marriage gave it the right to administer matrimonial affairs,<sup>279</sup> the interest which Thomas takes in this matter should not surprise us. He agrees with the Papacy that 'in so far as it (marriage) is directed to the good of the Church, it must be subject to ecclesiastical power.'<sup>280</sup> Owing to the manner in which the sacramental value of marriage is conceived, however, the importance of marital faithfulness is diminished. For the sacrament consists in the fact that the union of husband and wife is indissoluble. Hence

278. S.T. II-II, cliv, 8; cf. 12. Since adultery may assume a variety of forms, Thomas found it difficult to maintain that this species of lust depends upon the woman who is the object or matter of the 'venereal act' (v. sup. p. 513). He was therefore inclined to say that the married man who has sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman is not an adulterer.

279. cf. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., p. 633.

280. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 267. Since faith and offspring are goods which marriage possesses because it is an 'office of nature' (cf. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 267; III, 122, pp. 110-114; 123, p. 115; 124, pp. 117f.), Thomas restricts the interest which the civil law may take in marriage to such things 'as the friendship and mutual services which husband and wife render to one another.' (Supp. xlii, 2).



it cannot be cancelled by a breach of faith. This does not mean that the church and its theologians were not concerned about marital faithfulness. A breach of faith was, after all, a mortal sin.<sup>281</sup> Nevertheless, it could not affect the validity and the significance of the marriage. This point of view will seem less extraordinary after we have analysed what Thomas says about the sacramental nature of marriage.

Thomas states that 'a sacrament properly so called is the sign of some sacred thing pertaining to man.' It may be defined as 'the sign of a holy thing so far as it makes man holy.'<sup>282</sup> Now, there are three elements in man's sanctification - Christ's passion (the cause), grace and the virtues (the form), and eternal life (the ultimate end). 'And all these are signified by the sacraments. Consequently a sacrament is a sign that is both a reminder of the past, i.e. the passion of Christ; and an indication of that which is effected in us by Christ's passion, i.e. grace; and a prognostic, that is, a foretelling of future glory.'<sup>283</sup> How does marriage conform to these requirements? First, 'in as far as it represents the mystery of Christ's union with the Church ... it is a sacrament of the New Law.'<sup>284</sup> Although it 'is not

281. S.T. II-II, cliv, 8; cf. 2, 12.

282. S.T. III, lx, 2.

283. S.T. III, lx, 3.

284. Supp. xlii, 2; cf. S.C.G. IV, 78, pp. 267ff..

conformed to Christ's passion as regards pain, it is as regards charity whereby He suffered for the Church who was to be united to Him as His spouse.<sup>285</sup> Secondly, 'the sacraments cause what they signify.' Hence 'we must believe that the sacrament of matrimony confers on those who are joined in wedlock the grace to take part in the union of Christ with His Church : since it is most necessary that they should so seek carnal and earthly things, as not to be separated from Christ and His Church.'<sup>286</sup> This view is expressed in different terms in the Supplement to the Summa Theologica. By 'Divine institution', Thomas claims, man receives in matrimony 'the faculty to use his wife for the begetting of children.' Thus he must also receive 'the grace without which he cannot becomingly do so.'<sup>287</sup> Finally, Thomas does not appear to have specified the predictive value of marriage but he must have believed that this particular sacrament foretells the union between Christ and the church in heaven, where vision and immediate presence will replace faith and sacramental presence. These, then, are the 'sacred things' signified by marriage. Our next task is to discover the sensible things which signify these 'spiritual

285. Supp. xlii, 1.

286. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 267.

287. Supp. xlii, 3.

and intelligible goods by means of which man is sanctified.<sup>288</sup>  
 In other words, we must enquire after the temporal implications  
 of the eternal truths to which marriage points. First we must  
 consider the essential elements of marriage.<sup>289</sup> Thomas says  
 that these elements are founded upon 'the mutual troth which  
 binds husband and wife together.'<sup>290</sup> Since the sacraments refer  
 to the Word incarnate and to man, who is an intelligent  
 as well as a sensuous creature, the sacramental actions must  
 be supplemented by the words of man. Words provide man  
 with his chief means of signification and without them the  
 significance of the material element in the sacrament, such  
 as the baptismal water, would not be understood.<sup>291</sup> Thus  
 words determine the form or specific character of the  
 sacrament. In marriage the crucial words are those with  
 which the partners exchange consent 'and not the priest's  
 blessing, which is a sacramental', a good that is attached  
 to the sacrament but is not essential to it.<sup>292</sup> This account  
 of the sacrament is similar to that which Hugh of St. Victor  
 elaborated early in the twelfth century. However, the

288. S.T. III, lx, 4.

289. Supp. xlv, 1; cf. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 268.

290. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 268.

291. S.T. III, lx, 6.

292. Supp. xliii, 1.

emphasis which Thomas places on mutual consent is not intended to promote the mutual love of husband and wife. It is designed to safeguard what is proper to the sacrament. If it is suggested that such love is implied in 'what is proper to the sacrament', we may point out that Thomas does not refer to marital love during his discussion of consent.<sup>293</sup> For the sacramental character of the consent derives from the indissolubility of the union into which the partners enter. 'Matrimony as a sacrament of the Church, must needs be the indissoluble union of one man with one woman' because 'the union of Christ with the Church is the unending union of one with one.' This unbreakable bond is the essential object of the marital consent 'which binds husband and wife together.'<sup>294</sup>

In the Summa Contra Gentiles Thomas does not identify the material element of the sacrament of marriage. He tells us that marriage is formed by mutual consent to an indissoluble union which signifies the relation between Christ and the church but he does not describe the matter which is thus transformed into 'the sign of a holy thing.'

293. Supp. xlvii.

294. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 268.

Which element in marriage plays the same part as the water in baptism? For an answer to this question we must consult the Supplement to the Summa Theologica. We must beware of regarding the Supplement as a definitive statement of Thomist opinion because its compiler occasionally includes material which contradicts what has been said earlier in the *Summa*.<sup>295</sup> Nevertheless, we shall examine its treatment of the sacramental matter of marriage since this reveals some of the difficulties which arise when marriage is regarded as a sacrament.

Thomas contends that the material element in this sacrament, as in Penance, is provided (or replaced) by 'the sensible acts' of the recipients. Such acts 'perfect' the sacrament.<sup>296</sup> What are these 'sensible acts'? Does the fact that they 'perfect' the sacrament imply that the validity of the sacrament is independent of them? The second question is soon answered. Thomas tells us that 'the acts externally apparent are the sacrament only; the bond between husband and wife resulting from those acts is reality and sacrament.'<sup>297</sup> Whatever the acts involve, the sacrament derives its reality from them. Without them no

295. v. sup. p. 522, note 273.

296. Supp. xlii, 1, ad 2.

297. Ibid, ad 5.

bond could be formed between husband and wife and the relation between Christ and the Church would not be signified. In a later article Thomas appears to answer our question concerning the content of these acts. 'Just as the water of Baptism together with the form of words' constitute that sacrament, 'so the outward acts and the words expressive of consent directly effect a certain tie which is the sacrament of matrimony.'<sup>298</sup> Thus the 'sensible acts' are those which occur when the partners consent to marry one another. During his discussion of second marriages, however, Thomas suggests that the material element is the integrity of the parties who contract the marriage. One of 'the essentials of the sacrament' is 'the due matter - which results from the parties having the conditions prescribed by law.'<sup>299</sup> Thomas clearly found it difficult to specify the matter of the sacrament of marriage. He was convinced that 'the sensible acts' accompany the exchange of consent but he could not determine the nature of those acts.

Thomas does not overlook that 'sensible act' which we might have expected to be the matter of the sacrament of marriage. He even allows that sexual intercourse possesses

298. Ibid, 3, ad 2.

299. Supp. lxiii, 2.

sacramental value. Whereas the indissolubility of marriage signifies the eternal bond between Christ and the church and 'is necessary for the sacrament', however, sexual intercourse merely signifies 'the union of Christ with the Church.'<sup>300</sup>

Hence it is not an essential element of the sacrament.

Thus he manages to avoid a number of problems. If sexual intercourse was the material element in the sacrament of marriage, it would be a means of receiving grace. However,

Thomas was convinced that it needed the grace of the sacrament in order to be excused.<sup>301</sup> It cannot be a sign of the union of Christ with the church unless it is excused.<sup>302</sup>

If sexual intercourse was a means of grace, the parents of Christ would have lacked something which was essential to marriage. Thomas assures us that they did not. Their marriage was 'absolutely true' as far as its form or specific character was concerned. It possessed that 'inseparable union of souls, by which husband and wife are pledged by a bond of mutual affection that cannot be sundered.' Mary and Joseph even gained a share in the 'end of matrimony'. Although 'conjugal intercourse' was not responsible for the

300. Supp. xliii, 4, ad 2; cf. 1, ad 4; cf. S.T. III, xxix, 2.

301. Supp. xlix, 4; 5; cf. xlii, 3; S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 267.

302. Supp. xlix, 4.

birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were responsible for 'the upbringing of the child.'<sup>303</sup> If sexual intercourse was a means of grace the marriages of unbelievers would possess sacramental value. Since Thomas believed that it was impossible to serve an unknown God, he could not allow that it was possible to receive his grace.<sup>304</sup> Finally, if sexual intercourse was the material element in the sacrament, the validity of marriage would depend upon the future actions of the partners. Such openness to the future would conflict with the interest of a church which was seeking to put matrimonial affairs in order. For it would give rise to cases in which the authorities could not be sure that the sacrament had been performed.

Catholic apologists have often argued that the sacramental view of marriage encouraged the common man to value his sexuality. We cannot entirely agree with their point of view. For medieval theologians considered that the sacrament provided a remedy for concupiscence rather than a glorification of sex.<sup>305</sup> They also maintained that continence

303. S.T. III, xxix, 2.

304. S.C.G. III, 118, pp. 100f.; S.T. II-II, x, 3; cf. xx, 3.

305. cf. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 267; Supp. xlii, 3; xlix, 1, ad 3. Thomas also expected the married woman to be less modest than the single. For he feared that a husband might despise a wife who was modest and so 'fall into adultery'. (S.T. II-II, clxix, 2).



was a better means of overcoming concupiscence.<sup>306</sup> Nevertheless, there is some truth in the claims of the apologists because the common man would not have grasped those fine distinctions which the theologians made in order to exclude sexual activity from the sacrament of marriage. Furthermore, these distinctions can introduce an element of contradiction into the theological position. Thus Thomas contended that the sexual intercourse which took place in a Christian household signified the union of Christ with the church, even though it had to be forgiven by means of sacramental grace. He also realized that the 'mutual troth' which is the foundation of a marriage was something more than a commitment to a permanent association. Those who consent to marry grant each other the 'power to have carnal intercourse.'<sup>307</sup> Hence Thomas can go so far as to say that the marriage debt must be paid whenever one partner has need of it.<sup>308</sup> Since the marital agreement has more than one object, Thomas can state that, 'as a sacrament of the Church,' marriage has three goods one of which is 'the sacrament.'<sup>309</sup>

306. Supp. xlii, 3, ad 3; cf. inf., pp. 542f..

307. Supp. xlviii, 1.

308. Supp. lxiv, 2.

309. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 268; cf. p. 267: marriage 'is directed to several ends.'

In spite of the emphasis which this statement places on the unity of the sacrament, however, Thomas wants to distinguish between marriage as an 'office of nature' and as 'a sacrament.'<sup>310</sup> Thus he can claim that 'there is no matrimony without inseparability, whereas there is matrimony without faith and offspring,'<sup>311</sup> and yet maintain that 'between unbelievers there is marriage indeed, but not perfected by its ultimate perfection as there is between believers,'<sup>312</sup> despite the fact that the perfection of the latter form of marriage consists in inseparability.

Thomas had to distinguish marital faithfulness and procreation from the sacramental element in marriage in order to make the sacrament independent of the future actions of the partners. This distinction reveals a fundamental difficulty of maintaining that marriage is 'a sacrament of the Church.' Husband and wife must perform a sacrament which

310. S.C.G. IV, 78, p. 267.

311. Supp. xlix, 3 (my italics).

312. Supp. lix, 2.

they will never be in a position to revoke.<sup>313</sup> Thus a point at which the sacrament takes place once for all must be specified and the future of the marriage must become irrelevant. In other words, two of the 'goods' of marriage cease to be necessary. Marriage becomes a state which is divided against itself. In so far as Thomas realized that marriage was a unity he did begin to appreciate the value of the sexual act. Thus he stated that sexual intercourse resulted from the personal pledge of each partner and that it was of sublime significance. In so far as he limited the sacrament to the permanence of the marital bond, however, he did little to dignify the sexual life of man.

Although Thomas believed that 'the divine law' provided a 'supernatural reason' for the indissolubility of

313. Unless they choose to take orders. Thomas argues that marriage is no impediment to sacred order because it is based on 'our consent' and 'human acts can be impeded' whereas the other 'has a sacramental cause appointed by God' and 'the power of the sacraments is unchangeable' (Supp. liii, 4, ad 5). This argument is evidence of that 'lack of clear thought' which caused the church to increase the confusion of medieval matrimonial law (cf. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., p. 633). On the one hand, marriage is a sacrament and so belongs to the jurisdiction of the church. On the other hand, it is something less than a sacrament and so various things, of which sacred order was one, may be obstacles to it. Although we have not examined the Thomist account of the impediments with which the church surrounded marriage, we have analysed the source of the confusion thus created. Marriage is an ambiguous sacrament. Ecclesiastical lawyers were among the few who profited by this ambiguity (cf. Coulton, op. cit., pp. 636 ff.).

marriage and thus supplied 'the defect of natural instinct',<sup>314</sup> he also thought that natural instinct indicated to reason that marriage should be the permanent union of one man with one woman. He supports this thesis by referring to such things as the pattern of affairs in the animal kingdom, the scope of paternal concern, the necessity of protecting the family property, and the value of promoting equity and cordiality in the marital relationship.<sup>315</sup> Once the indissolubility of marriage becomes a matter of argument, however, it must be admitted that the bond of marriage can degenerate into a form of bondage. Hence the emphasis which society places on the permanence of the bond is variable. Thomas was able to maintain that the indissolubility of marriage was required by 'natural law',<sup>316</sup> because he considered that 'the precepts of the divine law are in themselves right by nature.'<sup>317</sup> Thus he could afford to ignore the arguments which advocates of divorce might put forward. Furthermore, he was not prepared to tolerate exceptions to the law,<sup>318</sup> even though he admitted

314. S.C.G. III, 123, p. 116.

315. S.C.G. III, 123, 124, pp. 114 - 119.

316. Ibid and cf. Supp. xli, 1; lxvii, 1.

317. S.C.G. III, 129, p. 128.

318. v. sup.pp. 514-516.

that the generality of the law resulted in an unequal distribution of the burdens of responsibility. For he was convinced that chance would always play a large part in human affairs. While he acknowledged that no one is absolutely bound to continence, for example, he could blithely state that it is possible to be bound 'accidentally'. If adultery should lead to separation, the innocent party must practise continence<sup>319</sup> and so accept what is presumably an opportunity to share in the suffering of Christ.<sup>320</sup>

The rigour with which Thomas would apply 'the divine law' should not prevent us from recognizing the element of compassion in some of his arguments for the permanence of marriage. Since the medieval woman possessed few privileges, she needed the security which a home could provide. Thomas took her situation into account when he wrote that the 'mutual love' of husband and wife 'will be the more constant if they know that they are indissolubly united.'<sup>321</sup> These words anticipate a passage in Bonhoeffer's wedding sermon: 'It is not your love which sustains the marriage, but from now on the marriage that sustains your love.'<sup>322</sup> We may doubt

319. Supp. lxii, 5.

320. Thomas considered that the fores, or habitual concupiscence, provided the Christian with such an opportunity (S.T. I-II, lxxxv, 5, ad 2).

321. S.C.G. III, 123, p. 117; cf. S.T. II-II, xxvi, 11 on the 'intensity' of the love that is based on a permanent union.

322. Cited in Ian M. Fraser, Sex As Gift, S.C.M., 1967, p. 37.

whether marriage is a sacrament or a state which in some respect is independent of man but we should not overlook the contribution which such views can make to the quality of marital life. If members of society are encouraged to think that marriage will be permanent, they will be less inclined to marry hastily and more likely to persevere in the face of a marital crisis. However, the medieval theologian also held that those who lacked a religious vocation were obliged to combat concupiscence by means of marriage. Thus the beneficial effects of the permanence of marriage were largely undermined. For those who are expected to marry, and yet delay their decision, will arouse the suspicion of their contemporaries. The majority will therefore prefer to risk a marriage which may well prove to be a misfortune. Moreover, some members of the sex which is numerically superior will be unable to marry and will therefore become objects of reproach. In the thirteenth century this fate was reserved for women.<sup>325</sup> The theologians chose to ignore this problem because they

323. v. G.G. Coulton, op. cit., pp. 629f.. He points out that 'the nuns did not number one-twentieth of the men who, as clerics in major orders or cloisterers, were similarly withdrawn from the marriage market.' He estimates that there were 20,000 priests in a population of about four million in England just before the Black Death. When the population reached 50 million after the Great War there were 21,000 priests (op. cit. p. 123).

believed that there was a more excellent remedy for concupiscence.

F. The Thomist view of celibacy.

Although Thomas presents us with an exhaustive account of the virtue of celibacy, he adds little to our knowledge of this aspect of medieval theology. One of the most interesting features of his discussions is the emphasis which he places on recognition of the superiority of celibacy. Thus he acknowledges that all are bound to love God with their whole heart but claims that 'there is a measure of fulfilment of this precept sufficient to avoid sin, which is, if a man do what he can as the condition of his state requires, provided he do not despise the idea of doing better, for by such contempt, the mind is set and rooted against spiritual progress.'<sup>324</sup> This proviso is couched in terms whose severity indicates that the fourth Lateran Council, which was held in 1215 had not managed to quell all the opposition to clerical celibacy.<sup>325</sup> Thomas realized that such opposition threatened the order of the

324. S.T. II-II, cxxxvi, 2, ad 2.

325. H.C. Lea, History Of Sacerdotal Celibacy In The Christian Church, Third Edition, Vol. I, Williams and Norgate, London, 1907, pp. 410 ff..

church and he therefore undertook to refute every conceivable objection to clerical celibacy.<sup>326</sup> Nevertheless, we would have expected a mind as thorough as his to produce a systematic defence of the celibate state. In view of the importance which he attached to the ideas of Aristotle, we might also expect him to explain how celibacy could be justified by someone who believed that virtue is the mean.

Thomas announces that he is defending virginity against 'the error of Jovinian.' The heresy which was so offensive to Jerome had evidently lost little of its old force. Thomas argues that it 'is refuted above all by the example of Christ who both chose a virgin for His mother, and remained Himself a virgin, and by the teaching of the apostle who (1 Cor. vii) counsels virginity as the greater good. It is also refuted by reason, both because a Divine good takes precedence of a human good, and because the good of the soul is preferable to the good of the body, and again because the good of the contemplative life is better than that of the active life. Now virginity is directed to the good of the soul in respect of the contemplative life, which consists in thinking on the things of God, whereas marriage is directed to

326. v. S.C.G. III, 151 - 153, pp. 132 - 159; S.T. II-II, clii, 2.



the good of the body, namely the bodily increase of the human race, and belongs to the active life, since the men and women who embrace the married life have to think on the things of the world, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. vii. 34). Without doubt therefore virginity is preferable to conjugal continence.<sup>327</sup>

According to Thomas, then, Scripture is the principal witness to the superiority of the celibate state. Hence he either ignores or excludes the evidence to the contrary. He pays no attention to the context in which Jesus is reported to have made his remarks on eunuchs<sup>328</sup> and he endeavours to dismiss such awkward matters as the 'marriages of the patriarchs'<sup>329</sup> and the call of married apostles.<sup>330</sup> He also fails to recognize that the Pauline attitude to marriage and celibacy was rather ambivalent. On the one hand, Paul criticizes marriage because it divides the loyalty of the Christian, but, on the other hand, he advises everyone to remain in the state in which he was called and states that each has his *χαρίσμα ἐκ Θεοῦ*, 'his own special gift from God.'<sup>331</sup> However, Thomas was

327. S.T. II-II, ciii, 4.

328. e.g. S.C.G. III, 136, p. 155; S.T. II-II, clxxxvi, 4, ad 1.

329. e.g. S.C.G. III, 137, p. 156; S.T. II-II, clxxxvi, 4, ad 2.

330. S.T. II-II, clxxxvi, 4, ad 1.

331. 1 Corinthians 7: 32ff., 20, and 7.

content to follow the traditional interpretation of Scripture. The arguments with which he seeks to confirm the pre-eminence of celibacy are equally traditional, even though they are formulated in Aristotelian terms. Thus he contends that marriage is a state in which the flesh is bound to dominate the spirit. 'The use of sexual union hinders the mind from giving itself wholly to the service of God, and this for two reasons. First, on account of its vehement delectation, which by frequent repetition increases concupiscence, as also the Philosopher observes (Ethic 3 : 12) : and hence it is that the use of venery withdraws the mind from that perfect intentness on tending to God.'<sup>352</sup> This argument seems to imply that marriage stimulates concupiscence instead of curbing it. In that case Thomas should have agreed with Abelard that the Christian must avoid marriage at all costs. However, Thomas claims that sexual activity should be avoided for another reason. The man who indulges in it becomes involved 'in solicitude for the control of his wife, his children, and his temporalities which serve for their upkeep.'<sup>353</sup> In the Summa Contra Gentiles Thomas asserts

352. S.T. II-II, clxxxvi, 4.

353. Ibid.

that the anxiety of the married is 'continuous'.<sup>334</sup> Thus we are again prompted to doubt whether he can maintain that marriage is a Christian possibility. Since he equates spirituality with contemplation, he has to deny that worldly forms of activity can be vehicles of the human spirit. He preferred to think that sexual intercourse was comparable to 'the art of building'.<sup>335</sup>

This criticism of the state of marriage is but the obverse of the Thomist conception of the state of celibacy. Aristotelian theses combined with traditional doctrines to convince Thomas that celibacy was the condition of human perfection.<sup>336</sup> Celibacy offers man the advantages which Aristotle had discerned in the contemplative life<sup>337</sup> as well as those to which the Desert Fathers, the precursors of the

334. S.C.G. III, 136, p. 155.

335. Ibid, pp. 153f.; cf. S.T. II-II, clii, 2, ad 1; clxxxiv, 3. The purpose of this analogy is to show that it is not necessary for all to engage in sexual activity. The preservation of the species only requires that some 'attend to the act of procreating.' However, the significance of the analogy transcends its purpose. For the prevalence of the contemplative ideal meant that the medieval artisan was held in rather low esteem. Even an artist was considered to be little more than a craftsman. (v. e.g. S.T. I-II, lvii, 3; and cf. G.G. Coulton, op. cit. pp. 565 f.).

336. Celibacy is the state in which man can progress in perfection. v. S.T. II-II, clxxxiv, 3.

337. v e.g. S.C.G. III, 136 p. 155; S.T. II-II, clxxx, 7, ad 3; 8.

Western monastics, had referred.<sup>338</sup> Thomas also agrees with Anselm that chastity is enhanced when it is based on a vow. For the vow implies that a man intends to pursue charity, which is a 'greater good' than chastity because it directs man to God who is the final cause, or ultimate goal, of his existence. Furthermore, the vow means that a man 'offers God not only his act, but even his very power to act.' Even if a man who has made a vow of chastity appears less fervent than someone who happens to practise chastity, then, the chastity of the former 'will be more virtuous by reason of the greater good intended.'<sup>339</sup> Since the superiority of those who have deliberately sought the state of perfection is unverifiable, it is incontestable. Hence Thomas can go so far as to allow that an individual who is in this 'state' might not be perfect whereas one who is outside it might be. However, he adds that God alone can judge the hearts of man. The church must content itself with the evidence which is available to it. Consequently, it must presume that those who make a vow of chastity are sincere and that they are superior to those who refuse to bind themselves to the religious 'state'.<sup>340</sup>

338. v. e.g. S.T. II-II, clxxxiv, 3; clxxviii, 8.

339. S.C.G. III, 138, pp. 157ff.; cf. S.T. II-II, lxxviii, 4.

340. S.T. II-II, clxxxiv, 4. In other words the order of the Church cannot allow for a visible charisma.

This account of the state of perfection is clearly designed to support the order of the church. Those who enter into that state are fit to bear spiritual authority. An individual could therefore use celibacy as a means of achieving his ambition. This possibility is not excluded by the Thomist conception of the charity towards which the celibates were supposed to 'tend'.<sup>341</sup> Thomas describes charity as 'a friendship of man for God, founded upon the fellowship of everlasting happiness.'<sup>342</sup> God bestows the gift of charity upon the individual 'that he may first of all direct his mind to God, and this pertains to a man's love for himself, and that, in the second place, he may wish other things to be directed to God, and even work for that end according to his capacity.'<sup>343</sup> Thus charity encourages man to achieve his own perfection. In order to do so he must cut himself off from those things which hinder 'the act of charity,' including things 'such as marriage (and) the occupation of worldly business' which themselves are 'not contrary to charity.'<sup>344</sup> Since charity is not designed for 'worldly business,' it concentrates upon the spiritual welfare of the

341. S.T. II-II, clxxvi, 2.

342. S.T. II-II, xxiv, 2.

343. S.T. II-II, xxvi, 13.

344. S.T. II-II, clxxiv, 3.

neighbour. It desires 'that he may be in God.'<sup>345</sup> Furthermore, charity operates in the same manner as fire because it influences those who are close to us rather 'than those who are far removed; and in this respect the love of friends, considered in itself, is more ardent and better than the love of one's enemy.'<sup>346</sup> Thus Thomas attempts to moderate the demands of the Gospel. He claims that the man who is prepared to serve those who are at variance with himself displays 'the perfection of charity' but that few men are required to do so.<sup>347</sup> Perfect charity is a product of gratuitous grace, which is bestowed upon a few men in order that they may help others, and not of sanctifying grace, which merely unites a man to God.<sup>348</sup> This division of grace and the consequent division of love, lies at the heart of that individualism which we have discerned throughout the Thomist account of human sexuality and virtue. For Thomas maintains that sanctifying grace, which satisfies the ultimate need of the individual, is the source of all the virtues.<sup>349</sup> Whereas Aristotle thought that the social order and the contemplative life were interdependent, Thomas

345. S.T. II-II, xxv, 1.

346. S.T. II-II, xxvii, 7.

347. S.T. II-II, xxv, 8; cf. 9.

348. S.T. I-II, cxi, 1.

349. S.T. I-II, cx, 4, ad 3; I-II, lxxv, 3.

considered that the social virtues were means by which the individual could appropriate his ultimate goal.

Human nature varies from person to person and we may well consider that certain characters should not embark upon the celibate life. We may therefore doubt whether it is possible to argue that celibacy is morally and spiritually superior to marriage. If the choice is to be determined by psychological considerations, it is not a moral choice. Thomas admits that it may be better 'for a particular individual' to marry but he wants to maintain that 'in general ... for one man it is better to remain continent than enjoy the use of marriage.'<sup>350</sup> Now, we would argue that the choice of celibacy need not be dictated by psychological considerations and that celibates who have had to strive for their identity have often rendered valuable service to mankind. This may not prove that celibacy is always a superior mode of life but it at least establishes that men can desire to be celibate on moral grounds. However, once it is suggested that this decision should be made according to personal temperament it is difficult to anticipate what anybody's decision should be. In order to do so Thomas has

350. S.C.G. III, 136, p. 155.

to maintain that God or nature predestines men to different levels of virtue.<sup>351</sup> In other words he contends that moral or spiritual distinctions are established by the very structure of being, even though he elsewhere states that moral criteria only apply to acts which are voluntary.

Although natural endowments cannot be equated with moral virtues, they can be objects of social esteem. Someone who possesses the qualities of a statesman is of more value to society than a man who is only fit to be a labourer. Moreover, our moral judgments should take social distinctions into account. 'Where a man has been given much, much will be expected of him and the more a man has had entrusted to him the more he will be required to repay.'<sup>352</sup> We hardly need to point out that medieval society entrusted much to the celibates. However, their principal loyalty was to the church, not to the society which they were in a position to serve. Their celibacy was itself an indication of their loyalty. Pope Gregory VII had insisted on the celibacy of

351. Ibid. Gilby is correct when he points out that Thomas recognized the influence which 'physical and psychological situations' exert upon moral judgment (v. *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 18, Blackfriars, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966, p. 23, note 'K'), but he overlooks the fact that Thomas failed to recognize the restrictions which such considerations place on moral judgment.

352. Luke 12 : 48 (NEB).



the clergy partly because he realized that the church could not assert its authority unless its agents renounced all forms of worldly allegiance.<sup>353</sup> The emphasis which Thomas placed on the vow of obedience indicates that he shared the Hildebrandine conception of the church. He claimed that the man who promised to obey a clerical superior implicitly accepted the conditions of such obedience, including the poverty and the chastity which were the objects of further vows.<sup>354</sup> Thus the vow of obedience transformed the ascetic protest against the world into a means of achieving power in the world. Instead of exercising this power in the interests of the world, however, the medieval churchman was bound to serve an institution and an ideal which set the world at naught.

#### 6. The Thomist view of the Virgin.

The Thomist account of the beliefs which Christians may hold concerning the mother of Christ provides us with an interesting glimpse of the pressure which popular piety and the devotion of the friars were bringing to bear upon the theologians. Thomas agreed with Anselm that the sinlessness of Christ did not depend upon that of his mother. Nevertheless, he maintained that she had been freed from the power

353. v. Lea, op. cit., pp. 264f., 498f.; and cf. Coulton, op. cit., pp. 264f., 727.

354. S.T. II-II, clxxxvi, 8.

of sin. The 'anterior purification in the blessed Virgin was not required to prevent the transmission of original sin; but because it was proper that the mother of God should shine with the greatest purity.'<sup>355</sup> The notion of propriety determines all that Thomas has to say about Mary. It was 'fitting' that she should be cleansed from the fomes.<sup>356</sup> However, she was not cleansed until she had been animated and so she originally bore the stain of original sin.<sup>357</sup> Furthermore, she still had need of the atonement which her Son purchased on the Cross because her cleansing did not involve the restoration of original justice.<sup>358</sup> Thomas assures us that there are numerous things which Christians are entitled to believe about the Virgin. Thus he claims that she managed to resist every temptation to sin<sup>359</sup> and that she remained a virgin, even though she conceived and gave birth to

355. S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 5, ad 3.

356. S.T. III, xxvii, 3.

357. S.T. III, xxvii, 2; cf. 1, ad 3.

358. Ibid. Since this cleansing was sufficient to make her 'shine with the greatest purity', it indicates that the formal aspect of original sin lacks existential import. The fomes, the material aspect of original sin, is what affects the life of the individual. The privation of original justice is an inferential explanation of the fomes (cf. sup. pp. 495 ff. ).

359. S.T. III, xxvii, 4.

a son.<sup>360</sup> Such is the importance which he attaches to vows that he goes so far as to assert that she took a vow of virginity after she married Joseph.<sup>361</sup> Thomas also claims that this marriage occurred prior to the birth of Christ. He mentions some of the churchmen who shared this opinion and then suggests that there is no reason to disagree with them. On the contrary, 'since the Mother of the Lord (was) both espoused and a virgin, both virginity and wedlock are honoured in her person, in contradiction to those heretics who disparaged one or the other.'<sup>362</sup> We have already noted that Thomas considered the marriage of Mary and Joseph to be valid and complete and we pointed out that this view tended to disparage the sexual element in marriage.<sup>363</sup> However, it also implies that Thomas should not have taken the example of Mary as proof of the superiority of virginity.<sup>364</sup> Unless the sexual act is essential to marriage, Mary has bestowed equal honour on 'virginity and wedlock.' If the sexual act is essential to marriage, however, Mary does less than full honour to 'wedlock'.

360. S.T. III, xxviii, 1 - 3. The virgin conception was more than fitting because it prevented original sin from being transmitted to Christ (S.T. I-II, lxxxi, 4; III, xxxi, 1, ad 3).

361. S.T. III, xxviii, 4.

362. S.T. III, xxix, 1.

363. v. sup. pp. 531 f. .

364. S.T. II-II, clii, 4.

The relation between popular piety and social attitudes is an issue which is bound to emerge during any discussion of Marian devotion in the Middle Ages. Thomas contended that the status of Mary required no transformation of social values. 'The male sex is more noble than the female, and for this reason He (Christ) took human nature in the male sex. But lest the female sex should be despised, it was fitting that He should take flesh of a woman.' In short, Thomas refused to depart from the views which Augustine had expressed on the significance of the Virgin Birth.<sup>365</sup> If medieval woman did benefit by devotion to the Virgin, her good fortune was not due to the theologians. Rather was it due to that popular piety with which the theologians were forced to come to terms.

Since we have already compared those aspects of Thomist thought which are relevant to the ethics of sex with traditional views on the subject, we are now in a position to give a brief summary of the conclusions we have reached. We may begin by stating the following principle: the more general the views that Thomas puts forward, the more generous is his estimation of human nature. He does not regard the pleasure that man can derive from his

365. S.T. III, xxix, 4, ad 1.

various activities as something incidental to those activities. On the contrary, it encourages man to perform those tasks which his Creator has laid upon him. In itself, therefore, sexual pleasure is above ethical suspicion because it serves the purpose of maintaining the species.<sup>366</sup> Thomas also stipulates that temperance is not a matter of avoiding pleasure and he criticizes the sombre character on the ground that it is burdensome to others.<sup>367</sup> The most significant feature of his treatment of virtue, however, is his acceptance of non-Christian criteria of goodness. Without denying that Christian charity informs the life of man and so promotes all the virtues, he recognizes that man does not have to be Christian in order to appreciate certain values. Reason enables him to know truths about God and about living in society.<sup>368</sup> We may question the independent status that Thomas seems to give to the social virtues but we must nevertheless applaud their theological reinstatement. Together with the reason on which they are founded, the social virtues may be more dependent on some apprehension of the ultimate goal of existence than Thomas

366. S.C.G. IV, 83, pp. 286f.; cf. S.T. II-II, cxli, 6.

367. S.T. II-II, clxviii, 4.

368. S.T. I-II, xciv, 2.

was prepared to admit. However, it is better to exaggerate the importance of the social virtues than to neglect it. If theology makes the latter mistake, it does not have the mind of him who confronted the world in the form of a servant. By means of his theory of natural law Thomas at least attempted to include the goals of historical existence in his account of the destiny of man. Even his theory of original sin, however ambiguous it may be, was clearly designed to avoid a radical condemnation of the natural desires and aspirations of mankind. Original sin was not to be identified with any particular phenomenon of existence and its transmission could not depend on the commission of actual sin. The natural state of man is not one of communion with God but neither is it one of rebellion against God. Hence the grace of God is conceived to be the completion, rather than the negation, of human nature.

There can be no doubt that the ideas of Aristotle greatly assisted Thomas in elaborating his conception of human nature. All that he wrote on the subject arose out of the conviction that 'nothing in the things of nature is void of purpose',<sup>369</sup> and this enabled him to give a more adequate account of the goodness of creation than most of his

369. S.C.G. II, 22, p. 37.

predecessors had produced. Thus he emphasized that Scripture affirms the goodness of every part of creation, including the female sex,<sup>370</sup> and that 'this is in keeping with the divine goodness.'<sup>371</sup> The goodness of the 'Author of nature' extends beyond the natural principles that he has established to his commandments. The command to 'be fruitful and multiply' should be respected because God not only deserves to be obeyed but intends to take an interest 'in a multitude of individuals for their own sake.'<sup>372</sup> Thomas considered that the principles of nature and the commandments of Scripture were the components of the Eternal Law which governed the universe.<sup>373</sup> Although this conception of Providence helped him to appreciate the goodness of creation, it also inclined him to sanctify the current order of human affairs. Hence he failed to realize that history, as well as nature, was responsible for the role that medieval society assigned to woman. On Scriptural grounds he claimed that woman was created in order to provide help for man but he went on to argue that her service was limited to the bearing and rearing of children because the assistance that man required in connection with other forms of

370. S.C.G. II, 45, p. 108.

371. S.C.G. II, 44, p. 105.

372. S.T. I, xcvi, 1; I-II, lxxxv, lf..

373. S.T. I-II, xci, 4, ad 1.

activity was best supplied by his fellow man. This argument was based in part on an Aristotelian conception of the economy of nature which 'no more abounds in superfluities than fails in necessities.'<sup>374</sup> However, Thomas also thought that Scripture clearly indicated the purpose for which woman was created when it described husband and wife as 'two in one flesh.'<sup>375</sup>

Another factor in the ethical conservatism of Thomist theology was the very nature of that theological enterprise. Thomas set out to achieve a synthesis between the elements of traditional theology and the new insights which had attended the revival of interest in Aristotle. For this reason he was loath to depart further from the tradition than was necessary. The acceptance of new principles could, indeed, be facilitated by the retention of old practicalities. Hence the more he dealt with specific ethical matters, the more conservative his views became. His conservative treatment of sexual matters can of course be explained by his dualism. Although he acknowledged that the flesh was a natural principle of existence, he thought

374. S.T. I-II, xci, 2, obj. 1; cf. ad 1.

375. S.T. I, xcii, 1.



that its operations had to be checked by a heteronomous reason which refused 'to allow the world to be itself.'<sup>376</sup> Reason, with its monistic conception of ends and its individualistic conception of the virtues which are means to those ends, with what Gene Outka has described as the "single-act analysis" about "what nature requires" in regard to sexual relations',<sup>377</sup> could not come to terms with the vitality of bodily existence or the richness of personal relations. The order which it sought to impose on existence was ill-founded and narrow and, sooner or later, it was bound to be undermined.

Thomas was concerned about the order of both church and society. He conceived of the former in Hildebrandine terms and, for this reason, his defence of celibacy contained little that was novel. The sacramental system of the medieval church demanded that matrimonial affairs be subject to ecclesiastical control and Thomas therefore had to undertake the impossible task of explaining the order of marriage according to principles which invited men to transcend historical concerns. He was unable to demonstrate that fertility and fidelity were essential to marriage

376. R. Gregor Smith, The Free Man, Collins, London, 1969, p. 67.

377. G. Outka, 'Character, Conduct, and the Love Commandment' in Norm and Context in Christian Ethics, ed. by G. Outka and P. Ramsey, S.C.M., London, 1969, p. 55.

because it was only supposed to symbolize the inviolable union between Christ and the church. He recognized that progeny and faithfulness were two of the 'goods' of marriage but he denied that they had anything to do with the sacramental 'good' of the institution. Thus medieval men and women were encouraged to respect the continuation, rather than the quality, of marriage. Although we have argued that marriage may derive benefit from a social context in which it is expected to survive, we must admit that it should not be expected to do so in all circumstances. The survival of a marriage in which there is no meeting of minds and bodies is a contradiction in terms and only serves to discredit the institution. Moreover, an institution which commands little respect is in no position to confer order on the lives of men. Hence we can conclude that the confusion of natural and sacramental principles on which Thomas based his account of marriage increased the likelihood of disorder, the things he most feared.

Although Thomas advocated means of achieving social order which were somewhat inadequate, he was genuinely concerned about the welfare of society. He agreed with Cicero that justice was the most important of the cardinal virtues because the just man seeks order 'not only in

himself but also in regard to another.<sup>378</sup> Thomas proved that he was aware of the relational factors in human virtue when he pointed out that frivolity, one form of immodesty, could be harmful to a neighbour.<sup>379</sup> However, the virtues which promoted the good order of society were for the most part conceived in terms which were paradoxically individualistic. This was especially true of temperance which, according to Thomas, was primarily a matter of curbing those 'internal emotions which are called the passions of the soul.'<sup>380</sup> Thomas did recognize the paradox to which we have referred but he thought that it could be explained away. A legal code takes the goals of the individual into account because 'the plan for the common good ... has to come down to them.'<sup>381</sup> The point is well made but it hardly justifies the individualism that pervades the Thomist account of temperance. Some would argue that such individualism is always to be found in a legalistic ethic. We would suggest that the alliance between legalism and individualism is a matter, not of necessity, but of history. The Thomist synthesis was the culmination of an endeavour to meet the needs of society without sacrificing the welfare of the individual

378. S.T. I-II, lxvi, 4.

379. S.T. II-II, clxviii, 3.

380. S.T. I-II, lx, 2; cf. II-II, cxli, 2.

381. S.T. I-II, xc, 2, ad 1.

soul. In other words, Thomas was attempting to fit social ethics into a metaphysical framework. When the legal order of society is founded upon metaphysical principles it fails to allow for historical development. It is considered to have been established once for all. Nevertheless, the vitalities of human existence cannot be denied altogether. Man must therefore be given an opportunity to progress towards goals which do not threaten the social order. Such are the goals which Thomas offers him. On the one hand, he can treat the social virtues as means of preparing himself for the beatific vision that awaits him and, on the other hand, he can begin to appropriate his 'end and ultimate perfection',<sup>382</sup> by means of the theological virtues which 'direct us aright to God.'<sup>383</sup> The greatest of the theological virtues is charity which not only informs the relations between a man and his neighbours but, above all, enables him to 'direct his mind to God.'<sup>384</sup> In the end, therefore, law and the social order are designed to serve the spiritual interests of the individual. It has been said that Aristotle regarded ethics as 'a branch of politics' because 'ethics is the science of the Good' whereas 'politics is the science of

382. S.C.G. II, 87, p. 259.

383. S.T. I-II, lxii, 1.

384. S.T. II-II, xxvi, 13.

the highest or supreme Good.<sup>385</sup> If that is true, then it must also be said that Thomas has inverted the Aristotelian scheme and transformed politics into a branch of ethics.

385. P. Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

### CONCLUSION

Patristic and medieval theologians would have expressed surprise at the question which has led us to examine their ethics of sex. Since the New Testament invites us to look for the moral fruits of faith, they would have argued, we should expect theology, in which the terms of faith are elaborated, to influence ethics, in which an account is given of the moral life. This expectation seems to be borne out by the different foundations which these theologians provide for the moral life. For the factors which they discern in moral decision vary according to the terms in which they conceive faith in the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Thus Tertullian, who believed that the Spirit had dispensed a new and eschatological revelation of the divine will, stressed that the agent of the moral life was the will which was free to determine whether or not a man was obedient to God and so a member of the truly spiritual community. Cyprian realized that the theology of Tertullian took insufficient account of the role that divine grace has to play in the moral life of man and therefore contended that man did not have to fulfil a set of stern demands in order to belong to the community of the Spirit. Baptism was both the seal of membership in this community and the symbol of Christian unity because it signified that man had been

endowed with the Spirit. However Cyprian appreciated the dialectic of gift and demand in the Christian life and he maintained that the Christian man could not enjoy the fruits of the Spirit unless he submitted to discipline. The importance which he attached to discipline was matched by the emphasis which he placed upon the role of the will in the formation of the moral life. Although he considered that the rigour of sectarian ethics was excessive, then, Cyprian did not allow his conception of divine grace to challenge the form of sectarian ethics. He simply believed that the will of man required some divine assistance in order to obey the will of God. So, too, did Jerome, whose brand of asceticism was more than a match for that of Tertullian and seemed to some of his contemporaries to call both the catholicity of the church and the sanctity of marriage in question. Ambrose, who was in a better position to appreciate the importance of the Christian community and the variety of spiritual gifts, began to develop a theology in which God was conceived to be the source of excellence rather than the seat of authority. For this reason he considered that God not only commanded man to do what was right but also invited him to recognize what was good. Thus reason assumed an important role in the determination of the moral life. The grace of God consisted

less in the assistance that the will received in its endeavour to be obedient and more in the virtue that attracted the mind to the Good. Although Ambrose was prepared to admit that the philosophers knew something of this virtue, he contended that the Bible revealed it in its fulness. He therefore expected the Christian community to comprise a number of men and women whose excellence would transcend the virtue which the majority of their brethren shared with the noble pagans. Another who regarded the Christian community as the representative of a transcendent excellence was Augustine, who acknowledged that he had learned much from Ambrose. In the course of his ministry, however, the bishop of Hippo also learned that there was something in human nature which offered stubborn resistance to the divine goodness, even though God had drawn near to man in the person of Jesus Christ. Such perversity served to indicate that the will was the crucial factor in the moral life and it also indicated that the will was not the autonomous principle that some theologians had supposed it to be. The will could not give direction to the life of man unless it had a goal, desire for which was its own principle of movement. Under the conditions of existence man was bound to have a limited vision of his goal but the Spirit of God was capable of redeeming him from his attachment to



worldly things by implanting divine charity in his heart, that is to say, by presenting his will with an object of affection which was a radical alternative to any that he had previously known. Nevertheless, Augustine realized that the presence of charity did not enable the will to dispense with the virtue of obedience. Although the Spirit endowed the will with a transcendental affection, it did not remove man from the sphere of limited affections and, in order to escape these, he not only had to rely upon the grace of God but also had to cultivate obedience to the divine commands.

Variations in theological perspective and ethical emphasis can also be found amongst medieval theologians. Anselm of Canterbury, who was deeply indebted to the monastic tradition and yet a most original thinker, contended that God was, above all, the embodiment of justice and therefore required man to engage in a voluntary pursuit of justice for its own sake. Peter Abelard, whose thought was less speculative but more critical than that of Anselm, considered that the crucial element in the moral life was intention because he believed that man was called to make an inward yet practical response to the incarnation of the divine wisdom in Jesus Christ. He maintained that human intentions should also be informed by divine love which led to the

incarnation of Wisdom. Hugh of St. Victor developed a sacramental theology which invited men to appreciate the mystery and the richness of an existence which, in all its facets, symbolized the eternal goodness upon which it depended. He agreed with Augustine, whom he regarded as the greatest of the Fathers, that the new sense of spiritual value which the Spirit imparted to man did not free man from the moral struggle with which monastic theologians had been so preoccupied. On the contrary, appreciation of spiritual things intensified their claims and therefore imbued the will with a keener sense of its obligations to God. Whereas Hugh was most impressed by the mystery of the universe, Thomas Aquinas, with his knowledge of Aristotle, appreciated its intelligibility. According to Thomas, the universe was founded upon the Eternal Law, part of which could be discerned by human reason. However, knowledge of the immanent principles of existence was not sufficient to provide man with an understanding of the purpose of existence itself. For the latter he had to depend on the authority which the church possessed by virtue of the wisdom which God, through the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had bestowed upon it. Men who accepted this

authority could set their minds, their intellects and wills, to the task of constructing a society which not only embodied the virtues that were implicit in the very notion of social life but also enshrined those theological virtues which pointed to the fulfilment of the social enterprise. Thus the excellence which patristic theologians had sought in and for the Christian community was now to be incorporated in the structure of society.

Although sociological factors may explain the interest that patristic theologians shared in the idea of excellence and that medieval theologians began to take in the social order, these interests found expression in terms whose variety seems to indicate that theological perspective and ethical emphasis are inter-dependent. This implies that the theologian's conception of the relation between God and man does influence his conception of the moral life of man. However, we should also expect the latter conception to influence his theological formulations. Thus observation of the recalcitrance of his flock combined with a growing appreciation of the demands which the God of the Bible made upon man to convince the greatest of the bishops of Hippo that the charity which the Spirit imparted to the hearts of men had to be supplemented by an obedience that they voluntarily

rendered to God. In arguing for the reciprocal influence of theology and ethics we do not intend to beg the question concerning the ethical necessity of a theological position. We have not dealt with this question because our enquiry has been limited to the sphere of theological ethics in which the anthropology which forms so large a part of meta-ethics, or the theoretical context in which a scholar elaborates his ethics, has been determined by theological rather than humanistic considerations. It will suffice for us to consider a basic feature of the ethical argument between the theologian and the humanist. The first thing that we should observe is that the argument seems unlikely to produce a definite conclusion. Since it concerns different presuppositions of human thought and action, it fails to provide the common ground on which agreement might eventually be reached. For this reason historical factors have determined the apparent course of the argument as much as the ability of the protagonists. The case of the humanist appears to be strongest when it is argued against the theologian who has to relate his conception of transcendence to a society which is confident of its ability to preserve and improve itself. In a period of social crisis the arguments of the

theologian will cause less affront and evoke less derision because there will be a greater awareness of the limited powers of mankind and so a keener appreciation of a message concerning a transcendental source of hope for mankind. In the final analysis, then, the argument between the theologian and the humanist cannot be expected to determine the context in which ethics should be done but it can help to clarify our understanding of history or the factors which shape human destiny.<sup>1</sup> To deny that it will be conclusive, is not to deprive it of relevance to the human situation.

Another aspect of our enquiry into theological ethics concerns the practical import of a theological perspective. In other words, we have asked whether theological principles exert a material, as well as a formal, influence upon ethics. Do the views that a theologian expresses on a specific subject, such as the

1. In other words, we should not expect the argument to settle the meta-ethical question of the meaning that is to be ascribed to moral terms. Professor W.K. Frankena has made a useful analysis of this problem, which he describes as one of 'normative metaethics.' v. 'On Saying the Ethical Thing' in Proceedings and Address of the American Philosophical Association, 1965-1966, vol. 59 (Yellow Springs, Ohio : Antioch Press, 1966), pp. 21-42. A brief account of what Frankena means by 'normative metaethics' can be found in 'The Case of the Curious Exception', the essay which Paul Ramsey contributed to the volume Norm and Context in Christian Ethics, ed. by Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey, S.C.M., London, 1969, pp. 120-122.

sexual relation, reflect his conception of that fundamental relation between God and man as much as his general theory of the moral life, or the moral nature of man, seems to do? Evidence of such ethical dependence can be produced, although it may not be as significant as it seems at first sight.

Tertullian, with his conception of the new and eschatological law of the Spirit, may be said to have defined the terms of ethical discussion in the patristic church. He considered that the Spirit of the Christian community called for a rejection of worldly forms of behaviour, among which he included remarriage of the widowed. With little regard to variations in personal circumstances he argued that one experience of marriage was sufficient to appease the sexual drive of man. Finally, he embodied this Spirit of world-denial in a legal system which, by its very nature, was somewhat inimical to freedom of sexual expression. For human passion is a law unto itself, as the apostle Paul seems to have realized.<sup>2</sup> Cyprian substituted an ecclesiological for a legalistic interpretation of the movement of the Spirit but he

2. v. Romans 7:5 and 21 ff.. In view of the fierce criticism to which the Pauline view of sex has sometimes been subjected we should perhaps note that the apostle clearly recognized the variety of forms in which human passion could manifest itself (v. Galatians 5:19ff.). Furthermore, he resisted those who seem to have argued that no concession whatsoever should be granted to the sexual passion of man (v. 1 Corinthians 7:1-9).

agreed with Tertullian that the principal gifts of the Spirit involved renunciation of worldly patterns of behaviour, especially those which applied in the sphere of sexual relations. However, he acknowledged that the Spirit bestowed a variety of gifts upon those who were baptized and that the church could not expect all its members to conform to the chastity for which Tertullian had contended. Thus something of an ecclesiastical double standard began to appear in the ethical thinking of the patristic church. The world was accommodated without the distinctive virtues of the Christian being sacrificed. The latter were regarded as signs of moral excellence and not as the normal pattern of behaviour in the Christian community. As Jerome, taking his cue from the apostle Paul,<sup>5</sup> pointed out, the standards of Christian behaviour did not correspond to the norms which the majority of men espoused. Jerome was so enthusiastic about the ascetic movement in the Eastern section of the church that he sometimes seemed to suggest that one was not a true Christian unless one shared the virtues of the hermit and the monk. He had no such intention. Both he and Ambrose realized that the social

3. v. 2 Corinthians 5:15.

conditions which prevailed throughout the Roman Empire guaranteed that the Spirit of separation from the world would continue to make an impact. Ambrose, however, was bishop of Milan and, although he encouraged those who practised the virtues of chastity and contemplation, he also had to concern himself with the needs of their weaker brethren, many of whom Tertullian would have excluded from the Christian community. The fruit of this concern was his account of the responsibilities of the clergy. His treatment of this subject has been described as 'a strange mixture of New Testament insights and the ascetic tradition of the fourth-century priests.' In other words, the presuppositions which Ambrose brings to his work 'seem to be drawn as much from Platonic, Stoic and monastic ethical reflection as from the Bible'.<sup>4</sup> If this judgment is intended to disparage the work, it can be criticized on the ground that an accommodation of theological and philosophical principles need not imply that the church has capitulated to the norms of society. It may equally imply that the church is making the necessary preparation for that service of society which the Lord of the church requires of his disciples. The use that Ambrose was

4. P. Lohmann, Ethics in a Christian Context, op. cit., pp. 35 ff..



prepared to make of classical conceptions of nature and virtue suggests that his work foreshadowed the achievement of medieval theology. History and the spirit of the age could then be said to have deprived the De Officiis Ministrorum of the recognition that it deserved. The collapse of Imperial society would appear to have reduced its relevance to the organizational needs of the church and the ascetic mood of the church would appear to have prevented its potential relevance from being noticed. In case we seem to be exaggerating the significance of the De Officiis, we had better recall that its author delighted in the spirit of withdrawal from worldly concerns and that he bore ample witness to the fact. Thus he departed from Cicero and argued that the virtue of prudence was superior to that of justice. This contention suggests that the Christian theologian was less concerned about the service of society than the pagan philosopher and that Lehmann might well have asked whether Ambrose had an adequate grasp of Christian principles instead of puzzling over the room that he made for philosophical conceptions of man and nature.

The bishop of Milan played an important part in the theological education of Augustine who learned, somewhat dramatically, to accept the conception of spirituality that

prevailed in the patristic church. Although he was also to recognize that the charity which the Spirit imparted to the will could find expression in various forms of virtue and that an apparent chastity might conceal a lack of charity, Augustine was able to assure the monks that his doctrine of grace was not designed to cast doubt on their conception of moral excellence or to curb the enthusiasm with which they endeavoured to achieve it. For his doctrine of grace, which pointed to the ultimate mystery of goodness, was complemented by his doctrine of original sin, which pointed to the ultimate mystery of evil. In so doing, however, the doctrine of original sin purported to explain the nature of mundane evil. Augustine was convinced that the evil in man, or the sinfulness of man, consisted of concupiscence, an inordinate desire for worldly goods of which the most seductive were sexual. Hence he conceived the love which God implanted in the hearts of man to be a means of transcending sexual desire and, indeed, all forms of worldly concern and pleasure and he could maintain that the chief fruits of the Spirit were those which other theologians had already discerned and members of monastic communities were already seeking.

With Augustine's doctrine of original sin we approach the heart of the patristic conception of human

sexuality. The doctrine provided him with a means of introducing the metaphysical dualism of the Platonists into his theological scheme. Man was conceived to be suffering from the disobedience of his primal ancestor and the state in which he now found himself was one of warfare between the spirit and the flesh. Whereas the Manichees, whose doctrines had once appealed to Augustine, identified the individual with one of the parties to this conflict, Augustine identified him with the conflict itself. His existence was divided from itself, that is to say, he was divided from himself because two principles of his being were in conflict. The flesh had flouted the intention of its Creator and rebelled against the spirit. Thus Augustine considered that the Platonists were theoretically mistaken but practically correct. The flesh was not intrinsically evil but the conditions of existence were such that it jeopardized the welfare of the soul. This account of the human condition might seem to explain the radical character of moral choice. Since man participates in the struggle between Good and Evil, he will always be in a position to pursue one or the other. As we have already observed, however, Augustine denied that the will was an autonomous agent. It required a principle of movement and, unless the grace of God

rescued man from the divided state in which he found himself, the flesh was bound to dominate his affections and his actions. The conflict between the spirit and the flesh was real but it was not equal. Either the flesh was dominant, in which case the spirit represented that potential which grace alone could fulfil, or the spirit was dominant, in which case the flesh represented that danger of moral failure in the face of which man had to practise obedience to the demands of God. In the latter case the possibility of making a moral choice does exist, although it is limited by the presence of charity, which is the supreme gift of grace. Without the assistance of grace, however, there is no possibility of making a moral choice. Augustine affirmed that this was indeed his view of the matter. Those who disagree with him may accuse him of ignoring the value of much that man does and, if they are men of faith, of unduly limiting the sphere in which grace operates.

The theological ethics of Augustine indicates the difficulty with which men who lack a sense of the historicity of existence come to terms with the divine promise to make all things new. In response to the demands of his age Augustine had recovered a sense of the gracious character of existence but, instead of encouraging him to recognize the rich potential of life in the world, it encouraged him to

seek fulfilment beyond the world because he conceived of existence in terms of a dualistic metaphysic which condemned the world to futility. Love, that mixture of gratitude, affection, and ecstacy with which the Spirit endowed the soul, invited and enabled it to transcend the existential conflict and to aspire towards its heavenly home. A rejection of existential concern in favour of a disembodied spirituality involved a repudiation of co-humanity. Even if original sin had not been identified with concupiscence and its transmission associated with procreation, then, the aspersion which it cast upon worldly concern was bound to have grave implications for the sexual life and, in particular, for the woman who was supposed to have been created for the purpose of maintaining the existence of the species. Nothing is more indicative of the individualism, or egocentricity, that pervades the ethics of the patristic church than the refusal of the theologians to acknowledge the existential implications of the sexual polarity of mankind. Nothing is more indicative of their refusal than the account which they gave of the primal act of human sin. In this prolegomenon to the doctrine of original sin Augustine argued that it was the woman who provided the devil with an opportunity to seduce the man from the Good. Augustine was not the first theologian to express

this opinion. Nor was he to be the last. For the inferior status which Western civilization had long bestowed upon the female provided theologians with a convenient means of explaining how men could ignore those permanent values which God had embodied in his creation and which creatures who were made in the image of God were quite capable of discerning.

Some historians and theologians have blamed the metaphysical dualism of classical philosophy for the ascetic and individualistic character of patristic ethics. Few of them have noted that Augustine, the greatest of the patristic theologians,<sup>5</sup> deliberately found a means of incorporating the metaphysic in his theology and none of them have seriously investigated his reason for doing so.<sup>6</sup> We have suggested that he and other patristic theologians feared that Christians were in danger of losing their identity in a world which had become less hostile, if not

5. This is intended to be an historical, rather than a theological judgment. The value of the contribution that Augustine has made to Christian theology may be debatable but the magnitude of that contribution is beyond dispute.
6. Psychological and cultural factors have recently received a great deal of attention but the concerns which Augustine consciously expressed in his works have been somewhat ignored. Although his theology does betray the influence of his mother and 'the mood of the age', the terms in which it was elaborated were also determined by the historic issues with which he had to deal.

more sympathetic, to the claims of the Gospel. The theologians were inclined to accept the dualistic metaphysic because it enabled them to maintain that Christians should separate themselves from the world and to explain what was involved in this separation. Thus they exaggerated what the New Testament had to say about the difference between Christians and men of the world. They failed to appreciate that much of the virtue to which the writers of the New Testament exhorted their readers was similar to that which the Gentiles approved.<sup>7</sup> Patristic theologians also failed to appreciate that the heroic forms of virtue which some sections of the New Testament enjoined upon the Christian community were peculiar to those who had to practise their faith in an oppressive environment.<sup>8</sup> Some of the theologians did deal with the issue of social responsibility but they still preferred the mystical or the ascetic style of life and therefore distorted the significance of social virtue. Ambrose denied that justice was of greater value than prudence and Augustine described the hermits as perfect examples of temperance.

7. v. e.g. Colossians 3:18 - 4:1; Ephesians 5:21 - 6:9; 1 Peter 2:11 - 3:7. These passages make use of the so-called 'household codes' which circulated in various parts of the Roman Empire. The first letter of Peter 'justifies' the use of these codes as follows: 'Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.' (1 Peter 2:11).

8. v. e.g. Matthew 10 passim.

This analysis of patristic ethics might seem to imply that the theologians reacted blindly to environmental changes which endangered the identity of the Christian community. The lengths to which most of the theologians went in order to prove that the Christian community produced men and women whose chastity excelled that of the pagans may be regarded as a clear sign of the jealousy with which they sought to preserve the independence of the community. The superiority of the Christian form of chastity was difficult to prove and the theologians did not manage to produce a common argument in support of their claim. Thus Ambrose falsely claimed that Christians alone were prepared to practise continence until death, whereas Jerome argued that their chastity was associated with other virtues which the pagans lacked. Augustine, with his doctrine of grace, was the only theologian to realize that excellence could not be identified with a particular virtue or style of life but he nevertheless maintained that Christian love tended to form men and women of the mystical or the ascetic type. Although he considered that pride was the very spirit of sinfulness, then, he allowed the peculiar presumption of patristic morality to remain unchallenged. He taught the virgin to beware of pride but not to question the superiority of her chastity.



Although patristic theologians were most anxious to guarantee the separate identity of the Christian community, it would be rash to conclude that theological principles exerted no influence upon their ethics of sex. In common with many of their contemporaries the theologians had lost, or never had, confidence in the world but their ethical teaching was more than a rationalization of this attitude. For they confronted the world with a tradition which taught men that the form of this world was passing away and therefore advised them not to adapt themselves to it. Since they tended to ignore those parts of the tradition in which men were invited to look and work for the redemption of the world, it could be argued that their interpretation of the tradition was itself determined by their attitude to the world. In the light of the tradition, however, they were prepared to concede that marriage required fidelity, which was a form of chastity, and that it bestowed certain blessings upon those who entered into it. They also recognized that the Christian was obliged to regard certain forms of asceticism as excessive. This helps to explain the monastic setting of Christian asceticism. A monastic community provided its members with a more reliable form of discipline than that which most hermits imposed upon themselves.

Patristic ethics may therefore be described as a critical response to the situation in which the Christian church found itself during the last two centuries of Imperial rule. The theologians were not simply reacting to change but neither were they responding with the confidence which one might expect to find amongst those who professed to believe in a God who had promised to make all things new. Their dualistic metaphysic did provide them with a means of comprehending the divine promise but it also expressed and confirmed their lack of confidence in the world. Hence they encouraged the individual to withdraw from the world and to prepare himself for a life which transcended that which he had so far known, not because this new life involved a reformation or transformation of the world, but because it belonged to a realm which only cast a shadow upon the world. In the last resort, then, the theologians were prepared to abandon the world to its fate and they may therefore be accused of contributing to the fate of the Roman Empire. They did appreciate the order which stable government conferred upon society and Augustine was able to defend the church against the charges that certain pagans brought against it. However, his theology hardly challenged the Christian community to recognize that passive support of social order was an inadequate

expression of the Christian mission in the world. Thus the church failed to grasp the opportunities which the conversion of the Emperor Constantine provided for its service of the world.

A critical response to social change was also made by the theologians of the High Middle Ages. A period of political stability and economic prosperity found most of them prepared to give a cautious approval to those who engaged in worldly business. All of them would have agreed with the account which Bernard of Chartres is reported to have given of the theological enterprise. According to John of Salisbury he 'used to compare us to (puny) dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.'<sup>9</sup> This celebrated remark implies that the theologian, like the Matthean scribe, is capable of producing new as well as old treasures from his store.<sup>10</sup> The novel elements in medieval theology were the confidence that the scholars exhibited in the mental powers of man and the

9. John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, III, iv; McGarry's translation cited by J. Huizinga in 'John of Salisbury: A Pre-Gothic Mind', in *Men And Ideas*, op. cit., p. 170.

10. cf. Matthew 13:52.

interest that they took in the welfare of society. Anselm of Canterbury developed the ontological proof of the existence of God and thus proved himself to be a speculative theologian of the highest order. His theology may therefore be said to indicate that revival of confidence in the power of reason to which we have just referred. Without this confidence the theologians of the High Middle Ages would not have dared to challenge certain aspects of the monastic tradition and their achievements would not have been possible. In making this judgment we are not suggesting monastic theology contributed nothing to the development of scholasticism. Anselm, who helped to lay the foundations of scholasticism, was greatly indebted to his monastic predecessors. They taught him to appreciate the justice of God and the obedience that was therefore required of the human will. With his doctrine of the Atonement, however, Anselm enlarged the monastic concept of divine justice and thus extended its existential import. He argued that the Incarnation was the product of divine justice because it not only provided man with an example of voluntary rectitude but also enabled him to follow that example without anxiety. For the God-Man had died in order to free mankind from the incalculable debt which, on account of its sin, it owed to God and he had also instituted a

sacramental means of forgiving all who repented of their sin. Thus purpose was restored to the moral life and men could embark with fresh hope upon the tasks which were allotted to them. Furthermore, Anselm acknowledged the value of tasks which differed from those which the monks endeavoured to fulfil. Since he considered that original sin afflicted the will rather than the flesh, he was able to recommend the chastity that both husband and wife were expected to practise. Nevertheless, he did concede that there was an element of truth in the traditional account of original sin and he saw no reason to deny the superiority of the monastic style of life. On the contrary, he emphasized the excellence of the voluntary obedience, as well as the celibacy, which the monk offered to God.

The element of world-denial in mediaval theology was fully revealed by Peter Abelard, who brought his remorseless logic to bear on the contradictions that he found in the tradition. Thus he argued that there was no such thing as original sin because sin implied personal responsibility. However, he did not intend to avoid condemning the flesh, which he regarded as the antithesis of the mind. He therefore claimed that sensual desire was the punishment that God had inflicted on man because of the disobedience of Adam and that marriage, which allows for such desire, must be a

hindrance to the life of the spirit and an obstacle to salvation. In the face of mounting opposition he was prepared to admit that some of his views were rather extreme but, in contrast with Jerome, whom he so much admired, he had to endure an official condemnation of his theology.

Although most theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were careful to avoid the excesses of the precocious rationalist, they did not reject his conception of the flesh altogether. They recognized that it was rooted in the tradition and the social and cultural developments of their age provided them with no incentive to depart from that tradition. Hence their affirmation of a world that was striving to introduce a semblance of order and grandeur into its affairs was quite ambiguous. The sacramental theology of Hugh of St. Victor itself indicates a sense of the order and the grandeur of the universe. Hugh endeavoured to comprehend the whole of reality and the symbolic character of its various elements. Since the symbol derived significance from the divine order that it symbolized, Hugh was able to discern something of the value of mundane existence. Thus he conceived of the love which should inform the relation of husband and wife in terms which indicated that sexual love was a reflection of the divine love. Matrimonial disputes

were now being referred to ecclesiastical courts and the church therefore had to determine the conditions of a valid marriage. This extension of ecclesiastical authority provided Hugh with an opportunity to emphasize the freedom with which a man and a woman should choose to enter into a relationship of mutual love. In spite of the significance which he discerned in the sacrament of marriage, however, Hugh remained critical of the institution. He defended the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and therefore commended marriages in which the spouses agreed to refrain from sexual intercourse, although he admitted that God was ready to forgive those who continued the practice. Furthermore, his conception of the sacramental nature of things was such that the symbol tended to be set aside for the sake of that which it symbolized. In common with Augustine, then, Hugh invited men and women to renounce sexual love and other forms of worldly concern in order to participate more fully in the transcendent love of God. He realized that those who accepted this invitation would be pursuing their own interests but he claimed that they were entitled to do so because the Good to which they devoted themselves was of supreme worth.

The culmination of scholastic theology was the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas and we find that the contradiction

between the secular and the religious vocations of the Christian is not adequately resolved in this great work. The theory of natural law provided Thomas with an opportunity to relate faith in the God who had created a well ordered universe to the affairs of men. Thus he maintained that human reason could discern enough of the Eternal Law to be the judge of the goals and delights of temporal life. Scholastic reason was certainly a more equitable judge than the ascetic spirit had been. Thomas agreed with Aristotle that existence was purposive and he therefore approved of anything that operated in accordance with its proper function. Whereas monastic theology condemned sexual pleasure, then, Thomas argued that the pleasure which accompanied a legitimate act of sexual intercourse served a useful purpose and should not be despised. However, Thomas failed to realize that function is too narrow a criterion of worth and the order that he expected reason to impose on sexual behaviour was heteronomous. He tended to ignore the personal factors which are involved in any form of human relation and was content to argue that sexual intercourse was the prerogative of the married couple, and that the only purpose of the act was the production of a family. Thomas also managed to confuse the inferior status of the medieval woman with the law of nature and refused to



allow the Eternal Law to call that inferiority in question.

The contribution that reason can make to the good order of society is jeopardized by other aspects of Thomist theology. In particular, the Thomist doctrine of original sin seems to undermine that confidence in human reason which is expressed in the theory of natural law. Thomas felt bound to maintain that men were somehow alienated from the God who had made them responsible for a fruitful creation. Although he found both the cause and the nature of this alienation difficult to explain, he acknowledged that theologians such as Augustine and Anselm had recognized something of its existential import. However, he claimed that original sin affected the eternal destiny rather than the temporal prospects of mankind. Society was supposed to be capable of surviving without the aid of the theological virtues which divine grace infused into the individual in order to prepare him for eternal fellowship with God. Society was also supposed to be capable of tolerating these virtues because the individuals who devoted themselves to the contemplation of divine truth were expected to be in the minority. Thus the social and the religious dimensions of existence were divorced from each other. Instead of developing a dialectic of world-affirmation and world-denial which would have enabled him to

make a realistic appraisal of the possibilities and the dangers of social life, Thomas exaggerated both the historical potential and the ultimate futility of life in the world. Since he could not conceive of an integrated existence in which men learned to hope without forgetting to repent and to repent without losing hope, he invited men to choose between an optimistic and a pessimistic style of life. Those who decided to participate in the affairs of the world were allowed to ignore the limitations of human reason, whereas those who decided to withdraw from society were allowed to presume that involvement in the affairs of the world hindered the service of God. In view of this presumption we are not surprised to find that Thomas sometimes introduces theological considerations into his discussion of social matters. He may have claimed that reason could guarantee the welfare of society but he preferred to determine the order of marriage according to the sacramental teaching of the church. Hence he considered that indissolubility, rather than fidelity, was the most important feature of marriage. His account of marriage prompts us to repeat that human reason, whatever its inadequacies, is a better judge of temporal affairs than the ascetic spirit which informed the sacramental theology of the medieval church.

The theologians of the High Middle Ages responded favourably to the social developments that they witnessed but they also maintained a critical perspective. Since the principle on which they based their criticism was one of world-denial, however, they tended to make the same mistake as their patristic predecessors. Although they conceded that the Christian could take his place in society with a clear conscience, they preferred him to withdraw from the world in order to cultivate the virtues which were presumed to indicate genuine devotion to God. For this reason an opportunity to provide the church with a new conception of its responsibility for society was lost. The theologians were content to support the initiatives which ecclesiastical statesmen such as Pope Gregory VII had taken in order to prepare the church for a more influential mission in the world. Even the spirit of world-denial served this purpose because it encouraged men and women to sever their connections with society and to become loyal servants of an ecclesiastical institution. The importance which Anselm of Canterbury attached to the monastic virtue of obedience is therefore indicative of the service which the medieval theologian rendered to his church.

Although medieval theology made some concessions to the world, it did nothing to forestall the romantic protest

against the exclusion of sensuality from the life of the spirit. As Kierkegaard was pleased to point out, this protest was bound to occur but we should hasten to add that it was most unrealistic. It may justify some of the criticisms that we have made of patristic and medieval theology but the theologians could afford to ignore its ethical challenge. For courtly society regarded romantic literature as a means of indulging in the popular medieval game of turning the world upside down. An ideal lady was no more capable of effecting an improvement in the status of the medieval woman than the Queen of Heaven, to whom even the theologians were prepared to do homage. Nor could the God of Love be expected to subvert the order that had been established by the God of the Catholic Church. Hence the ethos of courtly love was slow to transform the sexual mores and manners of Western man.<sup>11</sup>

The historian, Friedrich Heer, has painted a very gloomy picture of the situation in which the medieval woman found herself. He bluntly states that the Middle Ages 'had conspicuously failed to solve the problem of woman's place in society' and that 'it was left as a heavy mortgage on the future.'<sup>12</sup> Since the problem has yet to be completely solved,

11. cf. D.S. Bailey, The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought, op. cit., p. 156.

12. F. Heer, The Medieval World, op. cit., p. 266.

it might seem foolish to quarrel with the picture that Heer has painted. However, there was a ray of hope for medieval woman and a Franciscan preacher, Bernardino da Siena, was one of the few who managed to discern it. In a series of sermons which were designed for the worldly ladies of his native town and delivered in 1427 Bernardino advised his congregation that a genuine marriage was based on mutual profit, pleasure, and virtue, the substance of the three types of friendship that Aristotle had described.<sup>13</sup> Thus he implied that woman possessed a spiritual dignity which patristic and medieval theologians had consistently denied her. Although he agreed with many of the criticisms that the theologians made of female behaviour, Bernardino also defended 'a woman's right to be treated with both kindness and courtesy.'<sup>14</sup> He claimed that the hen which produced a daily egg was often treated with more patience than the wife who bore the children and helped to nurture them. For many husbands 'cannot bear with a word from their wife, who bareth such fair fruit, but if she speak a word more than he thinketh fit, forthwith

13. Extracts from six of the sermons of San Bernardino, can be found in G.G. Coulton (ed.), A. Medieval Garner, Constable & Co., London, 1910, pp. 605-618.

14. Iris Origo, The World of San Bernardino, Jonathan Cape, London, 1963, p. 55.

he taketh the staff and will beat her.<sup>15</sup> He considered that wives sometimes deserved a beating but he warned husbands that justice rarely demanded such severity. He also considered that woman's place was in the home. Nevertheless, the problem of her place in society will never be solved unless man heeds Bernardino's advice and learns to treat her with the respect that she deserves. We may therefore conclude that his sermons contain more practical wisdom, and offer more hope to woman, than the writings of many learned theologians.

We have established that the theologians of the patristic and medieval church responded critically to the social conditions and the patterns of behaviour which confronted them. Their ethical teaching was not a mere reaction to, or reflection of, what was happening in the world around them, neither was it a mere application of the Christian tradition. Much of what they had to say about ethical matters did reflect what was happening in society, many of their attitudes were reactions to changes in the environment of the Christian community, and they were often content simply to maintain the tradition. Nevertheless, the tradition did alter in the course of time and so, too, did the theological conception of

15. G.G. Coulton (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 612.

the world in which the Christian was required to serve his Lord. A world which stifled individual initiative and began to show signs of collapse seemed to demand the withdrawal of those who placed their faith in things unseen, whereas a world which was striving to put its affair in order seemed to demand their concern. In the former the elements of world-denial in the tradition assumed great importance, in the latter the doctrine of creation made more sense. However, those aspects of the Gospel which were deemed important themselves guided and confirmed the theological assessment of the world and of the stance that the Christian should adopt in and towards it. In spite of the confidence that medieval theologians expressed in human reason and in the social enterprise, then, the respect that they felt bound to pay to the tradition limited the encouragement that they gave to the world. Although they believed that the world had been designed for the glory of God, they also believed that the consummation of the divine plan entailed the destruction of the world. Hence the world was advised not to take itself too seriously and medical and scientific research was discouraged. History was soon to reveal the inadequacy of the foundations on which medieval

society was based. The horror of the Black Death proved that a doctrine of natural law was no substitute for investigation of the nature of things and the outbreak of the Hundred Years War indicated that the princes of Europe were not satisfied with a peace that frustrated their ambitions. These events of the fourteenth century contributed to a crisis of confidence in medieval society and thus the way was paved for a revival of ascetical theology.

The pessimistic note on which the Middle Ages drew to a close is well conveyed by 'The Imitation of Christ', the devotional classic which an Augustinian monk, Thomas à Kempis, compiled<sup>16</sup> during the fifteenth century. Thomas invites the reader to emulate 'religious persons' such as monks and nuns<sup>17</sup> who have realized that life on earth is a 'battle' in which man 'must fight continually' against 'the old enemy the fiend.'<sup>18</sup> What the Christian requires, therefore, is a strategy which will enable him to conquer the devil and to win 'the crown of patience'<sup>19</sup>, that 'true and inward peace'<sup>20</sup>

16. We are content to beg the question whether Thomas was the author or simply the editor of the work.

17. Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ (trans. by Richard Whitford), The Pocket Library, New York, 1953, pp. 62f. (I, xxv).

18. Ibid, pp. 146-148 (III, xix, xx).

19. Ibid, p. 146 (III, xix).

20. Ibid, p. 95 (II, xii).



which is a prelude to the eternal peace of heaven.<sup>21</sup> Since the devil operates by means of the 'wretched flesh',<sup>22</sup> an important part of the strategy is mortification of the flesh. 'Sometimes', Thomas states, 'it behoveth us to use, as it were, a violence to ourself, and strongly to resist and break down our sensual appetite, and not regard what the flesh will or will not; but always to take heed that it be made subject to the will of the spirit, and that it be so long chastised and compelled to serve, till it be ready to all things that the soul commandeth, and till it can learn to be content with a little, and can delight in simple things, and not murmur or grudge for any contrarious things that may befall unto it.'<sup>23</sup> The man who is striving for 'inward peace',<sup>24</sup> cannot afford to concern himself with the problems of the world. Thomas therefore advises the reader to cultivate 'first a zeal and a respect to thyself and to thine own soul, and then mayest thou, the more righteously and with the more due order of charity, have zeal upon thy neighbour.'<sup>25</sup> This statement seems to concede that charity should inform human relations but Thomas attacks the vanity of the world and the deception

21. Ibid, p. 207 (III, xlvii).

22. Ibid, p. 148 (III, xx).

23. Ibid, pp. 151f (III, xi).

24. Ibid, p. 96 (II, xii).

25. Ibid, p. 72 (II, iii).

of mankind with a severity which presses the reader to conclude that isolation is his only remedy. In the first section of The Imitation the reader is warned that everything 'in this world is vanity, but to love God and only to serve Him'. For this reason it is 'a great vanity to labour inordinately for worldly riches, which shortly shall perish, and to covet honour, or any other inordinate pleasure or fleshly delights in this life.'<sup>26</sup> Thomas later observes that 'great vanity' is also to be found 'in worldly wisdom'<sup>27</sup> and he is prepared to include knowledge of theological matters in this condemnation.<sup>28</sup> He therefore warns the reader 'not to dispute of high matters and of the secret judgments of God' because 'no man's reason, nor yet his disputation' is competent 'to search God's judgment.'<sup>29</sup> Thomas considered that 'the lover of Jesus' should 'forsake all other love beside Him, for He will be loved only above all other.'<sup>30</sup> Although the Christian is entitled to rejoice in the love which the Creator inspires a friend to bestow upon him<sup>31</sup> and obliged 'to bear the burden of others, to comfort others, to help others, to inform others, and to instruct and admonish others in all charity',<sup>32</sup> he also needs to learn that 'it is a vain thing to trust in man'.<sup>33</sup>

26. Ibid, pp. 31. (I, i).

27. Ibid, p. 181 (III, xxxiv).

28. e.g. Ibid, p. 3 (I, i); pp. 298 ff. (IV, xviii).

29. Ibid, pp. 239 f. (III, lviii).

30. Ibid, p. 79 (II, vii).

31. Ibid, p. 194 (III, xlii); cf. p. 181 (III, xxxiv).

32. Ibid, pp. 292. (I, xvi).

33. Ibid, p. 199 (III, xlv).

Since 'the love of creatures is deceivable and failing',<sup>34</sup> man should seek 'to be familiar only with God and with His Angels',<sup>35</sup> and 'to be so mortified in all such affections of worldly men' that he can afford to be without all man's comfort'.<sup>36</sup> Thomas provides the reader with a brief list of people whose company the Christian should seek to avoid. The list comprises 'young folks and strangers', those who are 'rich' or 'great', and women. 'Be not familiar to any woman', he writes, 'but all good women commend to God'.<sup>37</sup>

There is a marked contrast between The Imitation Of Christ and the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas. Whereas the scholastic theologian maintained that grace complemented nature and thus fulfilled the purpose of a wise Creator, Thomas à Kempis discerned 'a great difference betwixt the Creator and creatures, eternity and time, and betwixt the light made and the light unmade'.<sup>38</sup> He therefore exhorted man to 'take good heed of the motions of nature and grace; for they be very subtle and much contrary the one to the other'.<sup>39</sup> Since 'nature was vitiated and defiled by the sin of the first man Adam, ... the motions that are now left unto nature always

34. Ibid, p. 79 (II, vii).

35. Ibid, p. 16 (I, viii).

36. Ibid, p. 194 (III, xlii).

37. Ibid, pp. 15f. (I, viii).

38. Ibid, p. 181 (III, xxiv).

39. Ibid, p. 227 (III, liv).

draw man into evil.' Thomas concedes that 'the natural reason of man' is able 'to judge betwixt good and evil, and to shew the diversity betwixt true and false' but he adds that 'it is not of itself able to fulfil all that it approveth; nor sith the first sin of Adam hath it the full light of truth, or the sweetness of affections to God, as it had first.'<sup>40</sup> Thus the scholastic doctrine of natural law is rejected and the traditional elements in scholastic theology reassert themselves. The Christian is taught that life on earth is a form of 'exile',<sup>41</sup> and that he can neither expect nor hope to improve the conditions of existence. However, he can look forward to life in a realm of eternal peace and, in order to experience this transcendence, he must follow the path which Thomas Aquinas reserved for those who had a religious vocation. In other words, he must seek to be 'perfectly mortified to the world and to the flesh, and ... inwardly purified in soul' so that he can 'savour heavenly things' and experience something of 'heavenly contemplation.'<sup>42</sup>

We have consistently criticized the individualism, or the egocentricity, which pervades the ethics of patristic

40. Ibid, pp. 232f. (III, 1v).

41. Ibid, p. 21 (I, xii).

42. Ibid, p. 19 (I, xi).

and medieval theologians. This criticism is not intended to suggest that the Christian Gospel attaches little or no importance to the individual. On the contrary, we agree with Dietrich von Oppen that the Gospel emphasizes the radical responsibility of the individual. Both the Sermon on the Mount, in which the Lord of the church transforms the Law by issuing instructions which are introduced with the phrase 'But I say unto you ...', and the Creeds, in which the members of a Christian community begin their confession of faith with the words 'I believe ...', indicate that 'an institutional responsibility' has been replaced by 'a personal one'. The Gospel addresses an individual who is regarded as a citizen of the Kingdom of God and his responsibility now 'derives from a new relationship with the person of God, the person of the neighbour, and with his own self.'<sup>43</sup> Patristic and medieval theologians tended to regard the individual as a prospective member of a heavenly kingdom and so their presentation of the Gospel often overlooked his historical

43. D. von Oppen, 'The Era Of The Personal', in Man And Community, The Church And Society vol. IV (ed. by Egbert de Vries), S.C.M., London, 1966, pp. 155 f.; cf. D. von Oppen, 'Man in the Open Situation', in Translating Theology into the Modern Age, Journal For Theology And The Church, vol. II, (ed. by Robert W. Funk in association with Gerhard Ebeling), Harper & Row, New York, 1965, pp. 140 ff..

and social roots. Hence their conception of Christian responsibility tended to be institutional instead of personal. They provided the individual with various systems of discipline, such as an ascetic technique or a legal code, by means of which he was supposed to ensure his own salvation. Thus their conception of responsibility was not only institutional but individualistic. Nevertheless, the discipline which the theologians sought to impress on the Christian community did serve a useful purpose. It enabled men and women to cope with a world in which the forces of chaos threatened to reduce society to that primitive state which the philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, was later to describe. Our assessment of Thomist theology inclines us to agree with Coulton that the medieval church did 'much to free the soul from an inferiority-complex and to help the body by bringing order into anarchy.'<sup>44</sup>

However, we must repeat that Thomas and his predecessors failed to appreciate the personal dimension of Christian responsibility. Their institutional conception of the Christian life did not allow for the freedom which man requires in order to practise a personal form of responsibility. For this reason the Reformation was a matter, not of chance, but of necessity.

44. G.G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama, op. cit., p. 705. Nevertheless, Coulton was quite antipathetic to what he described as the 'Totalitarian Church' of the Middle Ages.

The human spirit was bound to claim its freedom and in Martin Luther it found one of its greatest advocates.<sup>45</sup>

The individualism of patristic and medieval ethics derived from the classical conception of transcendence. The theologians tended to identify the God whose promises determined the history of Israel with the God whose existence was an extrapolation of philosophical reason. Thus Augustine confessed his faith in 'true Being', Anselm emphasized the aseity of God, and Thomas Aquinas considered that God was the First Cause of the temporal and substantial order. It is doubtful whether a God whom reason infers from the world is truly transcendent. A Supreme Being does not seem to invite man to transcend the present conditions of existence because it may be regarded as the first among equals, the greatest of the entities that comprise the world. In that case it simply forms part of the established order of being. In order to protect the divinity of the Supreme Being human reason endeavours to separate it from the world but only succeeds in distorting the relation that faith discerns between God, the Creator and Redeemer, and the world. The God who is apprehended by human reason tends to divinize the reason that apprehends him and therefore

45. The Freedom of the Christian Man was, of course, one of the most important treatises that Luther composed.

tends to divide existence against itself. Hence the Being of Augustine tended to exclude the sensual dimension of human being from the life of the spirit. Since a Supreme Being may simply be the first among equals, it also tends to compete with other objects for the loyalty of man. The Imitation Of Christ was the product of faith in such a God. Finally, the God who is apprehended by human reason is comprehended in categories which often prevent the historicity of man and the world from being appreciated. The Eternal Law of Thomas Aquinas seemed to establish the order of virtue once for all and so later generations were not in a position to cope with historical developments which required a revision of the ethical task. An ontological order of value not only ignores the historicity of man. It also reduces the significance of evil. Instead of being a factor in human self-determination, which involves a voluntary response to a historical situation, evil is regarded as a matter of ignorance, to which the rational being has become strangely prone. The doctrine of original sin was designed to explain the predicament of the rational being but it only succeeded in altering the terms of the problem. Since Adam did not suffer from ignorance, his act of disobedience was difficult, if not impossible, to



explain. So too, was the influence which concupiscence, the penalty of that disobedience, was supposed to exert upon the mind, which the theologians regarded as the imago Dei. These consequences of 'the so-called classic theology of God as being'<sup>46</sup> suggest that man should either abandon the notion of transcendence or find one which takes the historicity of existence into account. With the later Prof. R. Gregor Smith we believe that the latter course represents the only critical, as well as the only theological, alternative. Unless man entertains an idea of transcendence, he will succumb to 'the peril of irresponsible acquiescence in the way of the world as a self-sufficient entity.'<sup>47</sup> Thus he will be just as incapable of discerning 'real hope for the world'<sup>48</sup> as theologians whose 'metaphysical views of transcendence' prevent the world from being treated with 'full seriousness.'<sup>49</sup>

Some of our contemporaries are suggesting that Christian ethics would benefit by a revival of the notion of natural law. In spite of the criticisms that we have made of the Thomist doctrine of natural law, we consider that the suggestion has much to commend it. For many of the arguments

46. R. Gregor Smith, The Doctrine of God, Collins, London, 1970, p. 93.

47. R. Gregor Smith, The Free Man, Collins, London, 1969, p. 106.

48. Ibid, p. 111.

49. Ibid, p. 103.

which have been brought against the general notion of natural law are less than conclusive and scholars who employ them often fail to appreciate the purpose of the natural law. It has been said that the fundamental principles of the natural law are so general that they fail to provide man with moral guidance. For this reason secondary principles have had to be deduced and these have been so specific that they have jeopardized the freedom which the moral agent requires in order to exercise personal responsibility. However, it can be argued that the generality of the first principles allows them to serve 'very much as do contemporary anthropological findings, namely to remind us of the fixed points of human nature which define as well as ensure the "humanity" of man'.<sup>50</sup> We are inclined to doubt whether 'human nature' has been established once for all but we would not deny the value of general principles which express the understanding that man now has of himself. Such principles need not be platitudes and they can therefore constitute the basis of constructive ethical reflection. Furthermore, the conclusions which men draw from these principles do not have to be inflexible. On the contrary,

50. David Little, 'Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural Law', in Norm and Context in Christian Ethics, op. cit., p. 193.

men should realize that the matters to which they apply general principles involve a number of variables and that the judgements which they make of such matters are bound to be provisional unless it is possible to calculate what the variables will be.

Theologians who oppose the theory of natural law often claim that it ignores the sinfulness of the moral agent and we ourselves have suggested that Thomas Aquinas was unable to reconcile his doctrine of natural law with his doctrine of original sin. However, this failure may only be due to the influence which classical thought exerted upon him. David Little has pointed out that Calvin expected the natural law to condemn man and not only to inform him.<sup>51</sup> Although we may want to argue that the Christian should regard judgement as a function of grace, we must admit that Calvin has advanced a tenable theory of the natural law. The functions that he ascribes to the natural law do not contradict one another and one of them takes the ambivalent character of the moral agent into account.

Those who advocate a theory of natural law often ignore the historicity of man. Instead of allowing for a development of human self-understanding they claim to have

51. Ibid, p. 184.

found 'the fixed points of human nature' and sometimes proceed to derive a set of definitive conclusions from their conception of human nature. Although we consider that the first principles of the natural law can be regarded as expressions of the self-understanding which man has developed in the course of history and that secondary principles can be elaborated without the autonomy of the moral agent being undermined, we are inclined to think that the inflexibility with which scholars have so often presented their theories of natural law indicates that this form of ethical procedure is defective. In order to explain the inflexibility to which the natural law is prone we would refer to psychological considerations. The moral agent would seem to appreciate a legal system because it can provide him with a means of settling the question of his own righteousness and of avoiding any new or special claims that his neighbours might make on him. For these reasons he will be reluctant to admit that the system needs to be changed. Thus there is an element of truth in each of the charges from which we sought to rescue the notion of natural law. On account of the sinfulness of the moral agent a doctrine of natural law will tend to produce rigid principles which fail to allow for the historicity of man. We would therefore maintain that the contribution which as

doctrine of natural law can make to Christian ethics is limited. Provided that the historical conditions of human existence are acknowledged, the fundamental principles of natural law may indicate something of that 'new anthropology' for which Prof. Gregor Smith invited us to search<sup>52</sup> and the secondary principles of natural law may help us to discern some of the implications of our new view of man. However, Prof. Gregor Smith realized that a Christian could not content himself with an anthropology which ignored 'the insights of Christianity about God in relation to man.' For the Christian understands himself in terms of the promise which is implicit in what God has done in and for this world and so he enters into life 'in the new hope and strength which he is given in this world.'<sup>53</sup> In accordance with this self-understanding Christian ethics will seek to clarify the implications of the divine promise and to provide the man of faith with a flexible strategy which will help him 'to account for the hope' that is in him.<sup>54</sup> Thus may he learn to glorify God in his body.<sup>55</sup>

52. R. Gregor Smith, The Free Man, op. cit., p. 70.

53. Ibid.

54. 1 Peter 3:15.

55. cf. 1 Corinthians 6:20.





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